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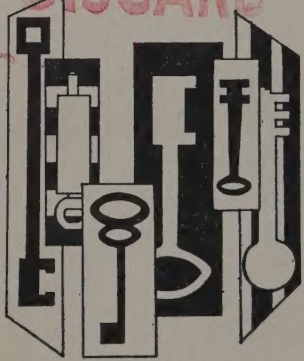
STEPHENS COLLEGE

STEPHENS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA, MO.

Collected Stories

by Fitz-James O'Brien

Edited with an Introduction by

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN

ALBERT & CHARLES BONI
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INTRODUCTION

A young man who came to New York in the early fifties of the last century to make his literary fortune would have had one great immediate ambition, especially if he were a writer of short stories. He would have blushed with pleasure if he had been introduced to Fitz-James O'Brien, just as a young man who came to New York for the first time fifty years later would have written home with pride that Richard Harding Davis had shaken hands with him or that O. Henry had bought him a drink. Davis and O. Henry are not yet forgotten, but how many people to-day could tell you what stories Fitz-James O'Brien has written? And yet O'Brien seems to me rather more significant in our literary history than either Davis or O. Henry, and to his contemporaries he was little short of a god.

Good work, however, is always sure of a resurrection. Have we not witnessed in these days the acclamation as great writers of Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson and Stephen Crane? America has been led by Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank, and others to seek for a usable past. In these writers, it finds at least part of what it is seeking, and while we are in a duly chastened mood, the time seems fitting to add to the roll the name of the most

distinguished American story-teller between Edgar Allan Poe and Bret Harte.

Fitz-James O'Brien was born in the County of Limerick, Ireland, about 1828. We are told that he was educated at Dublin University. I take this to mean that he went to Trinity College. About his early life before coming to America, he preserved an atmosphere of mystery which has so far proved well-nigh impenetrable. He used to claim that he had been in the British army, and the legend is that he ran through an inheritance of eight thousand pounds in London during the first two years after he left college. Be this as it may, we know that in 1851 or 1852 he was in a position wherein it seemed eminently desirable to him to seek a new fortune in a new world. Had he formed an attachment in the old country that was unrequited, and did this leave him ever afterward an unhappy and restless man? So the story goes in some quarters.

At any rate, we find him in New York in 1852, armed with many good letters of introduction to influential people, and for the next six years he is a more or less successful freelance turning his pen to many uses and his eminent gift for good fellowship to excellent account. Stories, criticism, plays, and poems flow from his pen, and in the evenings he leads the Bohemian rout with Nathaniel P. Willis and George P. Morris, while Aldrich sits by respectfully and listens to their talk. Let William Winter picture him for us as he saw him at that time.

"His raiment was superb; his library was excellent; his furniture was tasteful; and, like De Mauprat, he was 'splendid in banquets.' His personal appearance in those days—before, as happened in June, 1858, his nose had been broken by the blow of a pugilist—was singularly attractive. He had a fair and glowing complexion, and waving brown hair; his eyes were gray-blue, large, brilliant, and expressive; his smile was honest and sweet, and his countenance frank and winning; he was of the middle stature, an athlete in person, and he moved with negligent grace. His voice was rich in quality, loud and clear, and he had a bluff and breezy manner of speech, tending at times to a joyous turbulence. In a general way he retained these characteristics; but at the time of our companionship he had emerged from his condition of elegance, and his fortunes were low. He had no property; he was at variance with many old acquaintances; his face had suffered disfigurement; he lived nowhere in particular; and he was thoroughly well acquainted with hard times. I found him, in those gypsy days, a delightful associate. His animal spirits were prodigious. His literary invention was alert, vigorous, and almost incessant. His enjoyment of the passing hour was so keen, that it gave a zest to the enjoyment of all around him. No matter how close poverty might pinch, or how dark the clouds might lower over the portal of the future, the laugh of O'Brien blew care away from the cup of life, as the foam is blown from the white caps of the sea."

There, I think we see him now, Mr. Winter's rhetoric is part of O'Brien's background, and the rest of it is the elegant and slightly absurd dandyism of Nathaniel P. Willis, the reigning favorite, and as sorry a Beau Brummel as the America of the period could well have produced. O'Brien must have given this self-conscious and arty circle the European seal which was necessary for their self-respect, and I daresay he grinned in secret many a time. They helped him to indulge his extravagant tastes in Grub Street, and there is many an allusion in his companions' recollections to "the light heart and foaming flagon." The circle would have interested Mr. Dickens. But I suspect that O'Brien was rather more than a Dick Swiveller.

We know that he was moody, and it is fairly clear that secretly he despised his company. He is sometimes reported as "lawless, arrogant, and truculent," and at other times as "gentle, affectionate, and forlorn." I suppose that he lacked stability and moral courage, though as to his physical courage there seems to be no doubt. His literary life was exceedingly irregular and very productive. He had the energy, when he cared to use it, of a Dumas or a Balzac. His best is superb, and his worst shockingly bad. He thought he was a poet, and so did his contemporaries, but a charitable posterity will leave his poems decently buried. He was a tolerably successful hack-playwright, no better and no worse than the authors of most contemporary Broadway successes. He was a temperamental

critic, excellent in general principles, wilful in their particular application. I think we need not exhume any of his criticism. His judgments on his contemporaries are as shocking as those of Poe. But what important contemporaries were living for either Poe or O'Brien to criticise? But the best of his short stories call for no apologies, except our own for neglecting them so long. His own public was more intelligent.

When that masterpiece of imagination, "The Diamond Lens," appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January, 1858, the public response was as instantaneous as a later British public's response to Kipling. During the next three years, he gave the world his best, and had not the Civil War broken out, I dare say he would have given us as much as Poe and Hawthorne and have been as well remembered. But soon after the first gun was fired, he joined the 7th Regiment as Captain, and subsequently received an appointment on the staff of General Lander. The North had no braver soldier, but he was not destined to fight for it long. He was shot in a skirmish with Colonel Ashley's Cavalry on February 26, 1862, and after a lingering illness died on October 6 of that year at Cumberland, Virginia. They brought his body home and buried him with military honors in Greenwood Cemetery. His "Poems and Stories" were selected and published by William Winter a generation later.

Like Melville, like Poe, and perhaps like Hawthorne, his mobile face had a daemon in it, that

haunted daemon of unfulfilled expression so common in the history of American literary life. These men are not only daemonic, but they have a preoccupation with the scientific. The Goncourts writing fifty years ago noted the existence of this mathematical daemon and forecast from it the present machine age of America, seeing such an unfulfilled abstract literature as a portent, and knowing its power. What the Goncourts found in Poe, this "science hallucinée," is present to an even greater degree in O'Brien, as the reader of these stories will soon discover for himself. You may call "The Diamond Lens" or "The Wondersmith" or "The Lost Room" as rococo as you please. They are rococo, and so are Poe's stories and Poe's poems. But we are beginning to perceive that there is something to be said for the Rococo. T. S. Eliot and Conrad Aiken and the Sitwells are now admired, and rumors of the Magnasco Society have begun to cross the Atlantic. Perhaps we shall have a Rococo Society of our own.

Well, be that as it may. What qualities of interest do we find in Fitz-James O'Brien's best short stories to justify us in reading them to-day? I should reply that they are the creative result of a very powerful intellect playing with considerable intensity upon an interior life of great depth and terror, and not only registering with precision its own reactions to its discoveries, but formulating a philosophy as daring as Poe's, if less outspoken. The daemonic quality in O'Brien sprang from as potentially powerful an energy as that of Poe or

Melville, but it is less direct because less concentrated. Nevertheless, neither man has forecast the machine soul more powerfully than O'Brien did in "The Wondersmith" when he spoke of that artificial eye with "a fearful speculative light in its iris." His puppet life of evil full of unreality and phantasmagoria reflects the fear that is in so many writers who followed him in all countries, and his jaunty air of improvisation with all its freshness and fertility of imagination suggests the assumed ease of a thoughtful whistler exorcising doom. Like Poe, his stories have the same passionate love of phantom women, the same madly rational motive of crime, the same artificial defences against any revelation of the writer's personality.

And his friends thought him a *flaneur* and a wastrel as he lived dangerously, and when danger accepted his challenge and married him to death, they waited twenty years before they gathered his literary remains. Even then nobody paid the slightest attention, and I wonder now after forty-four years more have passed if he is really coming into his own. That, ladies and gentlemen, is in your hands. His day will come sometime, and he can afford to wait.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

New York,
February 23, 1925.

Collected Stories

COLUMBIA, MO.

THE DIAMOND LENS

CHAPTER I

THE BENDING OF THE TWIG

FROM a very early period of my life the entire bent of my inclinations had been towards microscopic investigations. When I was not more than ten years old, a distant relative of our family, hoping to astonish my inexperience, constructed a simple microscope for me, by drilling in a disk of copper a small hole, in which a drop of pure water was sustained by capillary attraction. This very primitive apparatus, magnifying some fifty diameters, presented, it is true, only indistinct and imperfect forms, but still sufficiently wonderful to work up my imagination to a preternatural state of excitement.

Seeing me so interested in this rude instrument, my cousin explained to me all that he knew about the principles of the microscope, related to me a few of the wonders which had been accomplished through its agency, and ended by promising to send me one regularly constructed, immediately on his return to the city. I counted the days, the hours, the minutes, that intervened between that promise and his departure.

Meantime I was not idle. Every transparent sub-

stance that bore the remotest resemblance to a lens I eagerly seized upon, and employed in vain attempts to realize that instrument, the theory of whose construction I as yet only vaguely comprehended. All panes of glass containing those oblate spheroidal knots familiarly known as "bull's eyes" were ruthlessly destroyed, in the hope of obtaining lenses of marvellous power. I even went so far as to extract the crystalline humor from the eyes of fishes and animals, and endeavored to press it into the microscopic service. I plead guilty to having stolen the glasses from my Aunt Agatha's spectacles, with a dim idea of grinding them into lenses of wondrous magnifying properties,—in which attempt it is scarcely necessary to say that I totally failed.

At last the promised instrument came. It was of that order known as Field's simple microscope, and had cost perhaps about fifteen dollars. As far as educational purposes went, a better apparatus could not have been selected. Accompanying it was a small treatise on the microscope,—its history, uses, and discoveries. I comprehended then for the first time the "Arabian Nights Entertainments." The dull veil of ordinary existence that hung across the world seemed suddenly to roll away, and to lay bare a land of enchantments. I felt towards my companions as the seer might feel towards the ordinary masses of men. I held conversations with nature in a tongue which they could not understand. I was in daily communication with living wonders, such as they never imagined in their wild-

est visions. I penetrated beyond the external portal of things, and roamed through the sanctuaries. Where they beheld only a drop of rain slowly rolling down the window-glass, I saw a universe of beings animated with all the passions common to physical life, and convulsing their minute sphere with struggles as fierce and protracted as those of men. In the common spots of mould, which my mother, good housekeeper that she was, fiercely scooped away from her jam pots, there abode for me, under the name of mildew, enchanted gardens, filled with dells and avenues of the densest foliage and most astonishing verdure, while from the fantastic boughs of these microscopic forests hung strange fruits glittering with green, and silver, and gold.

It was no scientific thirst that at this time filled my mind. It was the pure enjoyment of a poet to whom a world of wonders has been disclosed. I talked of my solitary pleasures to none. Alone with my microscope, I dimmed my sight, day after day and night after night, poring over the marvels which it unfolded to me. I was like one who, having discovered the ancient Eden still existing in all its primitive glory, should resolve to enjoy it in solitude, and never betray to mortal the secret of its locality. The rod of my life was bent at this moment. I destined myself to be a microscopist.

Of course, like every novice, I fancied myself a discoverer. I was ignorant at the time of the thousands of acute intellects engaged in the same pursuit as myself, and with the advantage of instru-

ments a thousand times more powerful than mine. The names of Leeuwenhoek, Williamson, Spencer, Ehrenberg, Schultz, Dujardin, Schact, and Schleiden were then entirely unknown to me, or if known, I was ignorant of their patient and wonderful researches. In every fresh specimen of cryptogamia which I placed beneath my instrument I believed that I discovered wonders of which the world was as yet ignorant. I remember well the thrill of delight and admiration that shot through me the first time that I discovered the common wheel animalcule (*Rotifera vulgaris*) expanding and contracting its flexible spokes, and seemingly rotating through the water. Alas! as I grew older, and obtained some works treating of my favorite study, I found that I was only on the threshold of a science to the investigation of which some of the greatest men of the age were devoting their lives and intellects.

As I grew up, my parents, who saw but little likelihood of anything practical resulting from the examination of bits of moss and drops of water through a brass tube and a piece of glass, were anxious that I should choose a profession. It was their desire that I should enter the counting-house of my uncle, Ethan Blake, a prosperous merchant, who carried on business in New York. This suggestion I decisively combated. I had no taste for trade; I should only make a failure; in short, I refused to become a merchant.

But it was necessary for me to select some pur-

suit. My parents were staid New England people, who insisted on the necessity of labor; and therefore, although, thanks to the bequest of my poor Aunt Agatha, I should, on coming of age, inherit a small fortune sufficient to place me above want, it was decided that, instead of waiting for this, I should act the nobler part, and employ the intervening years in rendering myself independent.

After much cogitation I complied with the wishes of my family, and selected a profession. I determined to study medicine at the New York Academy. This disposition of my future suited me. A removal from my relatives would enable me to dispose of my time as I pleased without fear of detection. As long as I paid my Academy fees, I might shirk attending the lectures if I chose; and, as I never had the remotest intention of standing an examination, there was no danger of my being "plucked." Besides, a metropolis was the place for me. There I could obtain excellent instruments, the newest publications, intimacy with men of pursuits kindred with my own,—in short, all things necessary to insure a profitable devotion of my life to my beloved science. I had an abundance of money, few desires that were not bounded by my illuminating mirror on one side and my object-glass on the other; what, therefore, was to prevent my becoming an illustrious investigator of the veiled worlds? It was with the most buoyant hope that I left my New England home and established myself in New York.

CHAPTER II

THE LONGING OF A MAN OF SCIENCE

My first step, of course, was to find suitable apartments. These I obtained, after a couple of days' search, in Fourth Avenue; a very pretty second-floor unfurnished, containing sitting-room, bedroom, and a smaller apartment which I intended to fit up as a laboratory. I furnished my lodgings simply, but rather elegantly, and then devoted all my energies to the adornment of the temple of my worship. I visited Pike, the celebrated optician, and passed in review his splendid collection of microscopes,—Field's Compound, Hingham's, Spencer's, Nachet's Binocular (that founded on the principles of the stereoscope), and at length fixed upon that form known as Spencer's Trunnion Microscope, as combining the greatest number of improvements with an almost perfect freedom from tremor. Along with this I purchased every possible accessory,—draw-tubes, micrometers, a *camera-lucida,* lever-stage, achromatic condensers, white cloud illuminators, prisms, parabolic condensers, polarizing apparatus, forceps, aquatic boxes, fishing-tubes, with a host of other articles, all of which would have been useful in the hands of an experienced microscopist, but, as I afterwards discovered, were not of the slightest present value to me. It takes years

of practice to know how to use a complicated microscope. The optician looked suspiciously at me as I made these wholesale purchases. He evidently was uncertain whether to set me down as some scientific celebrity or a madman. I think he inclined to the latter belief. I suppose I was mad. Every great genius is mad upon the subject in which he is greatest. The unsuccessful madman is disgraced and called a lunatic.

Mad or not, I set myself to work with a zeal which few scientific students have ever equalled. I had everything to learn relative to the delicate study upon which I had embarked,—a study involving the most earnest patience, the most rigid analytic powers, the steadiest hand, the most untiring eye, the most refined and subtile manipulation.

For a long time half my apparatus lay inactively on the shelves of my laboratory, which was now most amply furnished with every possible contrivance for facilitating my investigations. The fact was that I did not know how to use some of my scientific implements,—never having been taught microscopics,—and those whose use I understood theoretically were of little avail, until by practice I could attain the necessary delicacy of handling. Still, such was the fury of my ambition, such the untiring perseverance of my experiments, that, difficult of credit as it may be, in the course of one year I became theoretically and practically an accomplished microscopist.

During this period of my labors, in which I sub-

mitted specimens of every substance that came under my observation to the action of my lenses, I became a discoverer,—in a small way, it is true, for I was very young, but still a discoverer. It was I who destroyed Ehrenberg's theory that the *Volvox globator* was an animal, and proved that his "monads" with stomachs and eyes were merely phases of the formation of a vegetable cell, and were, when they reached their mature state, incapable of the act of conjugation, or any true generative act, without which no organism rising to any stage of life higher than vegetable can be said to be complete. It was I who resolved the singular problem of rotation in the cells and hairs of plants into ciliary attraction, in spite of the assertions of Mr. Wenham and others, that my explanation was the result of an optical illusion.

But notwithstanding these discoveries, laboriously and painfully made as they were, I felt horribly dissatisfied. At every step I found myself stopped by the imperfections of my instruments. Like all active microscopists, I gave my imagination full play. Indeed, it is a common complaint against many such, that they supply the defects of their instruments with the creations of their brains. I imagined depths beyond depths in nature which the limited power of my lenses prohibited me from exploring. I lay awake at night constructing imaginary microscopes of immeasurable power, with which I seemed to pierce through all the envelopes of matter down to its original atom. How I cursed those imperfect

mediums which necessity through ignorance compelled me to use! How I longed to discover the secret of some perfect lens, whose magnifying power should be limited only by the resolvability of the object, and which at the same time should be free from spherical and chromatic aberrations, in short from all the obstacles over which the poor microscopist finds himself continually stumbling! I felt convinced that the simple microscope, composed of a single lens of such vast yet perfect power was possible of construction. To attempt to bring the compound microscope up to such a pitch would have been commencing at the wrong end; this latter being simply a partially successful endeavor to remedy those very defects of the simple instrument, which, if conquered, would leave nothing to be desired.

It was in this mood of mind that I became a constructive microscopist. After another year passed in this new pursuit, experimenting on every imaginable substance,—glass, gems, flints, crystals, artificial crystals formed of the alloy of various vitreous materials,—in short, having constructed as many varieties of lenses as Argus had eyes, I found myself precisely where I started, with nothing gained save an extensive knowledge of glass-making. I was almost dead with despair. My parents were surprised at my apparent want of progress in my medical studies, (I had not attended one lecture since my arrival in the city,) and the expenses of my mad pursuit had been so great as to embarrass me very seriously.

I was in this frame of mind one day, experiment-

ing in my laboratory on a small diamond,—that stone, from its great refracting power, having always occupied my attention more than any other,—when a young Frenchman, who lived on the floor above me, and who was in the habit of occasionally visiting me, entered the room.

I think that Jules Simon was a Jew. He had many traits of the Hebrew character: a love of jewelry, of dress, and of good living. There was something mysterious about him. He always had something to sell, and yet went into excellent society. When I say sell, I should perhaps have said peddle; for his operations were generally confined to the disposal of single articles,—a picture, for instance, or a rare carving in ivory, or a pair of duelling-pistols, or the dress of a Mexican *caballero*. When I was first furnishing my rooms, he paid me a visit, which ended in my purchasing an antique silver lamp, which he assured me was a Cellini,—it was handsome enough even for that,—and some other knickknacks for my sitting-room. Why Simon should pursue this petty trade I never could imagine. He apparently had plenty of money, and had the *entrée* of the best houses in the city,—taking care, however, I suppose, to drive no bargains within the enchanted circle of the Upper Ten. I came at length to the conclusion that this peddling was but a mask to cover some greater object, and even went so far as to believe my young acquaintance to be implicated in the slave-trade. That, however, was none of my affair.

On the present occasion, Simon entered my room in a state of considerable excitement.

"*Ah! mon ami!*" he cried, before I could even offer him the ordinary salutation, "it has occurred to me to be the witness of the most astonishing things in the world. I promenade myself to the house of Madame —— How does the little animal —*le renard*—name himself in the Latin?"

"Vulpes," I answered.

"Ah! yes,—Vulpes. I promenade myself to the house of Madame Vulpes."

"The spirit medium?"

"Yes, the great medium. Great heavens! what a woman! I write on a slip of paper many of questions concerning affairs the most secret,—affairs that conceal themselves in the abysses of my heart the most profound; and behold! by example! what occurs? This devil of a woman makes me replies the most truthful to all of them. She talks to me of things that I do not love to talk of to myself. What am I to think? I am fixed to the earth!"

"Am I to understand you, M. Simon, that this Mrs. Vulpes replied to questions secretly written by you; which questions related to events known only to yourself?"

"Ah! more than that, more than that," he answered, with an air of some alarm. "She related to me things— But," he added, after a pause, and suddenly changing his manner, "why occupy ourselves with these follies? It was all the biology, without doubt. It goes without saying that it has

not my credence.—But why are we here, *mon ami?* It has occurred to me to discover the most beautiful thing as you can imagine,—a vase with green lizards on it, composed by the great Bernard Palissy. It is in my apartment; let us mount. I go to show it to you."

I followed Simon mechanically; but my thoughts were far from Palissy and his enamelled ware, although I, like him, was seeking in the dark a great discovery. This casual mention of the spiritualist, Madame Vulpes, set me on a new track. What if this spiritualism should be really a great fact? What if, through communication with more subtile organisms than my own, I could reach at a single bound the goal, which perhaps a life of agonizing mental toil would never enable me to attain?

While purchasing the Palissy vase from my friend Simon, I was mentally arranging a visit to Madame Vulpes.

CHAPTER III

THE SPIRIT OF LEEUWENHOEK

Two evenings after this, thanks to an arrangement by letter and the promise of an ample fee, I found Madame Vulpes awaiting me at her residence alone. She was a coarse-featured woman, with keen and rather cruel dark eyes, and an exceedingly sensual expression about her mouth and under jaw. She received me in perfect silence, in an apartment on the ground floor, very sparely furnished. In the centre of the room, close to where Mrs. Vulpes sat, there was a common round mahogany table. If I had come for the purpose of sweeping her chimney, the woman could not have looked more indifferent to my appearance. There was no attempt to inspire the visitor with awe. Everything bore a simple and practical aspect. This intercourse with the spiritual world was evidently as familiar an occupation with Mrs. Vulpes as eating her dinner or riding in an omnibus.

"You come for a communication, Mr. Linley?" said the medium, in a dry, business-like tone of voice.

"By appointment,—yes."

"What sort of communication do you want?—a written one?"

"Yes,— I wish for a written one."

"From any particular spirit?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever known this spirit on this earth?"

"Never. He died long before I was born. I wish merely to obtain from him some information which he ought to be able to give better than any other."

"Will you seat yourself at the table, Mr. Linley," said the medium, "and place your hands upon it?"

I obeyed,—Mrs. Vulpes being seated opposite to me, with her hands also on the table. We remained thus for about a minute and a half, when a violent succession of raps came on the table, on the back of my chair, on the floor immediately under my feet, and even on the windowpanes. Mrs. Vulpes smiled composedly.

"They are very strong to-night," she remarked. "You are fortunate." She then continued, "Will the spirits communicate with this gentleman?"

Vigorous affirmative.

"Will the particular spirit he desires to speak with communicate?"

A very confused rapping followed this question.

"I know what they mean," said Mrs. Vulpes, addressing herself to me; "they wish you to write down the name of the particular spirit that you desire to converse with. Is that so?" she added, speaking to her invisible guests.

That it was so was evident from the numerous affirmatory responses. While this was going on, I tore a slip from my pocket-book, and scribbled a name, under the table.

"Will this spirit communicate in writing with this gentleman?" asked the medium once more.

After a moment's pause, her hand seemed to be seized with a violent tremor, shaking so forcibly that the table vibrated. She said that a spirit had seized her hand and would write. I handed her some sheets of paper that were on the table, and a pencil. The latter she held loosely in her hand, which presently began to move over the paper with a singular and seemingly involuntary motion. After a few moments had elapsed, she handed me the paper, on which I found written, in a large, uncultivated hand, the words, "He is not here, but has been sent for." A pause of a minute or so now ensued, during which Mrs. Vulpes remained perfectly silent, but the raps continued at regular intervals. When the short period I mention had elapsed, the hand of the medium was again seized with its convulsive tremor, and she wrote, under this strange influence, a few words on the paper, which she handed to me. They were as follows:—

"I am here. Question me.

"LEEUWENHOEK."

I was astounded. The name was identical with that I had written beneath the table, and carefully kept concealed. Neither was it at all probable that an uncultivated woman like Mrs. Vulpes should know even the name of the great father of microscopics. It may have been biology; but this theory

was soon doomed to be destroyed. I wrote on my slip—still concealing it from Mrs. Vulpes—a series of questions, which, to avoid tediousness, I shall place with the responses, in the order in which they occurred:—

I.—Can the microscope be brought to perfection?

SPIRIT.—Yes.

I.—Am I destined to accomplish this great task?

SPIRIT.—You are.

I.—I wish to know how to proceed to attain this end. For the love which you bear to science, help me!

SPIRIT.—A diamond of one hundred and forty carats, submitted to electro-magnetic currents for a long period, will experience a rearrangement of its atoms *inter se*, and from that stone you will form the universal lens.

I.—Will great discoveries result from the use of such a lens?

SPIRIT.—So great that all that has gone before is as nothing.

I.—But the refractive power of the diamond is so immense, that the image will be formed within the lens. How is that difficulty to be surmounted?

SPIRIT.—Pierce the lens through its axis, and the difficulty is obviated. The image will be formed in the pierced space, which will itself serve as a tube to look through. Now I am called. Good night.

I cannot at all describe the effect that these extraordinary communications had upon me. I felt completely bewildered. No biological theory could

account for the *discovery* of the lens. The medium might, by means of biological *rapport* with my mind, have gone so far as to read my questions, and reply to them coherently. But biology could not enable her to discover that magnetic currents would so alter the crystals of the diamond as to remedy its previous defects, and admit of its being polished into a perfect lens. Some such theory may have passed through my head, it is true; but if so, I had forgotten it. In my excited condition of mind there was no course left but to become a convert, and it was in a state of the most painful nervous exaltation that I left the medium's house that evening. She accompanied me to the door, hoping that I was satisfied. The raps followed us as we went through the hall, sounding on the balusters, the flooring, and even the lintels of the door. I hastily expressed my satisfaction, and escaped hurriedly into the cool night air. I walked home with but one thought possessing me,—how to obtain a diamond of the immense size required. My entire means multiplied a hundred times over would have been inadequate to its purchase. Besides, such stones are rare, and become historical. I could find such only in the regalia of Eastern or European monarchs.

CHAPTER IV

THE EYE OF MORNING

THERE was a light in Simon's room as I entered my house. A vague impulse urged me to visit him. As I opened the door of his sitting-room unannounced, he was bending, with his back toward me, over a carcel lamp, apparently engaged in minutely examining some object which he held in his hands. As I entered, he started suddenly, thrust his hand into his breast pocket, and turned to me with a face crimson with confusion.

"What!" I cried, "poring over the miniature of some fair lady? Well, don't blush so much; I won't ask to see it."

Simon laughed awkwardly enough, but made none of the negative protestations usual on such occasions. He asked me to take a seat.

"Simon," said I, "I have just come from Madame Vulpes."

This time Simon turned as white as a sheet, and seemed stupefied, as if a sudden electric shock had smitten him. He babbled some incoherent words, and went hastily to a small closet where he usually kept his liquors. Although astonished at his emotion, I was too preoccupied with my own idea to pay much attention to anything else.

"You say truly when you call Madame Vulpes a

devil of a woman," I continued. "Simon, she told me wonderful things to-night, or rather was the means of telling me wonderful things. Ah! if I could only get a diamond that weighed one hundred and forty carats!"

Scarcely had the sigh with which I uttered this desire died upon my lips, when Simon, with the aspect of a wild beast, glared at me savagely, and, rushing to the mantelpiece, where some foreign weapons hung on the wall, caught up a Malay creese, and brandished it furiously before him.

"No!" he cried in French, into which he always broke when excited. "No! you shall not have it! You are perfidious! You have consulted with that demon, and desire my treasure! But I shall die first! Me! I am brave! You cannot make me fear!"

All this, uttered in a loud voice trembling with excitement, astounded me. I saw at a glance that I had accidentally trodden upon the edges of Simon's secret, whatever it was. It was necessary to reassure him.

"My dear Simon," I said, "I am entirely at a loss to know what you mean. I went to Madame Vulpes to consult her on a scientific problem, to the solution of which I discovered that a diamond of the size I just mentioned was necessary. You were never alluded to during the evening, nor, so far as I was concerned, even thought of. What can be the meaning of this outburst? If you happen to have a set of valuable diamonds in your possession, you need fear nothing from me. The diamond which I require you

could not possess; or, if you did possess it, you would not be living here."

Something in my tone must have completely reassured him; for his expression immediately changed to a sort of constrained merriment, combined, however, with a certain suspicious attention to my movements. He laughed, and said that I must bear with him; that he was at certain moments subject to a species of vertigo, which betrayed itself in incoherent speeches, and that the attacks passed off as rapidly as they came. He put his weapon aside while making this explanation, and endeavored, with some success, to assume a more cheerful air.

All this did not impose on me in the least. I was too much accustomed to analytical labors to be baffled by so flimsy a veil. I determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"Simon," I said, gayly, "let us forget all this over a bottle of Burgundy. I have a case of Lausseure's *Clos Vougeot* down-stairs, fragrant with the odors and ruddy with the sunlight of the Côte d'Or. Let us have up a couple of bottles. What say you?"

"With all my heart," answered Simon, smilingly.

I produced the wine and we seated ourselves to drink. It was of a famous vintage, that of 1848, a year when war and wine throve together,—and its pure but powerful juice seemed to impart renewed vitality to the system. By the time we had half finished the second bottle, Simon's head, which I knew was a weak one, had begun to yield, while I remained calm as ever, only that every draught seemed to send

a flush of vigor through my limbs. Simon's utterance became more and more indistinct. He took to singing French *chansons* of a not very moral tendency. I rose suddenly from the table just at the conclusion of one of those incoherent verses, and, fixing my eyes on him with a quiet smile, said: "Simon, I have deceived you. I learned your secret this evening. You may as well be frank with me. Mrs. Vulpes, or rather one of her spirits, told me all."

He started with horror. His intoxication seemed for the moment to fade away, and he made a movement towards the weapon that he had a short time before laid down. I stopped him with my hand.

"Monster" he cried, passionately, "I am ruined! What shall I do? You shall never have it! I swear by my mother!"

"I don't want it," I said; "rest secure, but be frank with me. Tell me all about it."

The drunkenness began to return. He protested with maudlin earnestness that I was entirely mistaken,—that I was intoxicated; then asked me to swear eternal secrecy, and promised to disclose the mystery to me. I pledged myself, of course, to all. With an uneasy look in his eyes, and hands unsteady with drink and nervousness, he drew a small case from his breast and opened it. Heavens! How the mild lamp-light was shivered into a thousand prismatic arrows, as it fell upon a vast rose-diamond that glittered in the case! I was no judge of diamonds, but I saw at a glance that this was a gem of rare size and purity. I looked at Simon with won-

der, and—must I confess it?—with envy. How could he have obtained this treasure? In reply to my questions, I could just gather from his drunken statements (of which, I fancy, half the incoherence was affected) that he had been superintending a gang of slaves engaged in diamond-washing in Brazil; that he had seen one of them secrete a diamond, but, instead of informing his employers, had quietly watched the negro until he saw him bury his treasure; that he had dug it up and fled with it, but that as yet he was afraid to attempt to dispose of it publicly,—so valuable a gem being almost certain to attract too much attention to its owner's antecedents,—and he had not been able to discover any of those obscure channels by which such matters are conveyed away safely. He added, that, in accordance with the oriental practice, he had named his diamond with the fanciful title of "The Eye of Morning."

While Simon was relating this to me, I regarded the great diamond attentively. Never had I beheld anything so beautiful. All the glories of light, ever imagined or described, seemed to pulsate in its crystalline chambers. Its weight, as I learned from Simon, was exactly one hundred and forty carats. Here was an amazing coincidence. The hand of destiny seemed in it. On the very evening when the spirit of Leeuwenhoek communicates to me the great secret of the microscope, the priceless means which he directs me to employ start up within my easy reach! I determined, with the most perfect deliberation, to possess myself of Simon's diamond.

I sat opposite to him while he nodded over his glass, and calmly revolved the whole affair. I did not for an instant contemplate so foolish an act as a common theft, which would of course be discovered, or at least necessitate flight and concealment, all of which must interfere with my scientific plans. There was but one step to be taken,—to kill Simon. After all, what was the life of a little peddling Jew, in comparison with the interests of science? Human beings are taken every day from the condemned prisons to be experimented on by surgeons. This man, Simon, was by his own confession a criminal, a robber, and I believed on my soul a murderer. He deserved death quite as much as any felon condemned by the laws: why should I not, like government, contrive that his punishment should contribute to the progress of human knowledge?

The means for accomplishing everything I desired lay within my reach. There stood upon the mantelpiece a bottle half full of French laudanum. Simon was so occupied with his diamond, which I had just restored to him, that it was an affair of no difficulty to drug his glass. In a quarter of an hour he was in a profound sleep.

I now opened his waistcoat, took the diamond from the inner pocket in which he had placed it, and removed him to the bed, on which I laid him so that his feet hung down over the edge. I had possessed myself of the Malay creese, which I held in my right hand, while with the other I discovered as accurately as I could by pulsation the exact locality of

the heart. It was essential that all the aspects of his death should lead to the surmise of self-murder. I calculated the exact angle at which it was probable that the weapon, if levelled by Simon's own hand, would enter his breast; then with one powerful blow I thrust it up to the hilt in the very spot which I desired to penetrate. A convulsive thrill ran through Simon's limbs. I heard a smothered sound issue from his throat, precisely like the bursting of a large air-bubble, sent up by a diver, when it reaches the surface of the water; he turned half round on his side, and, as if to assist my plans more effectually, his right hand, moved by some mere spasmodic impulse, clasped the handle of the creese, which it remained holding with extraordinary muscular tenacity. Beyond this there was no apparent struggle. The laudanum, I presume, paralyzed the usual nervous action. He must have died instantly.

There was yet something to be done. To make it certain that all suspicion of the act should be diverted from any inhabitant of the house to Simon himself, it was necessary that the door should be found in the morning *locked on the inside*. How to do this, and afterwards escape myself? Not by the window; that was a physical impossibility. Besides, I was determined that the windows *also* should be found bolted. The solution was simple enough. I descended softly to my own room for a peculiar instrument which I had used for holding small slippery substances, such as minute spheres of glass, etc. This instrument was nothing more than a long slen-

der hand-vice, with a very powerful grip, and a considerable leverage, which last was accidentally owing to the shape of the handle. Nothing was simpler than, when the key was in the lock, to seize the end of its stem in this vice, through the keyhole, from the outside, and so lock the door. Previously, however, to doing this, I burned a number of papers on Simon's hearth. Suicides almost always burn papers before they destroy themselves. I also emptied some more laudanum into Simon's glass,—having first removed from it all traces of wine,—cleaned the other wine-glass, and brought the bottles away with me. If traces of two persons drinking had been found in the room, the question naturally would have arisen, Who was the second? Besides, the wine-bottles might have been identified as belonging to me. The laudanum I poured out to account for its presence in his stomach, in case of a *post-mortem* examination. The theory naturally would be, that he first intended to poison himself, but, after swallowing a little of the drug, was either disgusted with its taste, or changed his mind from other motives, and chose the dagger. These arrangements made, I walked out, leaving the gas burning, locked the door with my vice, and went to bed.

Simon's death was not discovered until nearly three in the afternoon. The servant, astonished at seeing the gas burning,—the light streaming on the dark landing from under the door,—peeped through the keyhole and saw Simon on the bed. She gave the

alarm. The door was burst open, and the neighborhood was in a fever of excitement.

Every one in the house was arrested, myself included. There was an inquest; but no clew to his death beyond that of suicide could be obtained. Curiously enough, he had made several speeches to his friends the preceding week, that seemed to point to self-destruction. One gentleman swore that Simon had said in his presence that "he was tired of life." His landlord affirmed that Simon, when paying him his last month's rent, remarked that "he should not pay him rent much longer." All the other evidence corresponded,—the door locked inside, the position of the corpse, the burnt papers. As I anticipated, no one knew of the possession of the diamond by Simon, so that no motive was suggested for his murder. The jury, after a prolonged examination, brought in the usual verdict, and the neighborhood once more settled down into its accustomed quiet.

CHAPTER V

ANIMULA

THE three months succeeding Simon's catastrophe I devoted night and day to my diamond lens. I had constructed a vast galvanic battery, composed of nearly two thousand pairs of plates,—a higher power I dared not use, lest the diamond should be calcined. By means of this enormous engine I was enabled to send a powerful current of electricity continually through my great diamond, which it seemed to me gained in lustre every day. At the expiration of a month I commenced the grinding and polishing of the lens, a work of intense toil and exquisite delicacy. The great density of the stone, and the care required to be taken with the curvatures of the surfaces of the lens, rendered the labor the severest and most harassing that I had yet undergone.

At last the eventful moment came; the lens was completed. I stood trembling on the threshold of new worlds. I had the realization of Alexander's famous wish before me. The lens lay on the table, ready to be placed upon its platform. My hand fairly shook as I enveloped a drop of water with a thin coating of oil of turpentine, preparatory to its examination,—a process necessary in order to prevent the rapid evaporation of the water. I now placed the drop on a thin slip of glass under the

lens, and throwing upon it, by the combined aid of a prism and a mirror, a powerful stream of light, I approached my eye to the minute hole drilled through the axis of the lens. For an instant I saw nothing save what seemed to be an illuminated chaos, a vast luminous abyss. A pure white light, cloudless and serene, and seemingly limitless as space itself, was my first impression. Gently, and with the greatest care, I depressed the lens a few hair's-breadths. The wondrous illumination still continued, but as the lens approached the object a scene of indescribable beauty was unfolded to my view.

I seemed to gaze upon a vast space, the limits of which extended far beyond my vision. An atmosphere of magical luminousness permeated the entire field of view. I was amazed to see no trace of animalculous life. Not a living thing, apparently, inhabited that dazzling expanse. I comprehended instantly that, by the wondrous power of my lens, I had penetrated beyond the grosser particles of aqueous matter, beyond the realms of infusoria and protozoa, down to the original gaseous globule, into whose luminous interior I was gazing, as into an almost boundless dome filled with a supernatural radiance.

It was, however, no brilliant void into which I looked. On every side I beheld beautiful inorganic forms, of unknown texture, and colored with the most enchanting hues. These forms presented the appearance of what might be called, for want of a more specific definition, foliated clouds of the highest rarity; that is, they undulated and broke into

vegetable formations, and were tinged with splendors compared with which the gilding of our autumn woodlands is as dross compared with gold. Far away into the illimitable distance stretched long avenues of these gaseous forests, dimly transparent, and painted with prismatic hues of unimaginable brilliancy. The pendent branches waved along the fluid glades until every vista seemed to break through half-lucent ranks of many-colored drooping silken pennons. What seemed to be either fruits or flowers, pied with a thousand hues, lustrous and ever varying, bubbled from the crowns of this fairy foliage. No hills, no lakes, no rivers, no forms animate or inanimate, were to be seen, save those vast auroral copses that floated serenely in the luminous stillness, with leaves and fruits and flowers gleaming with unknown fires, unrealizable by mere imagination.

How strange, I thought, that this sphere should be thus condemned to solitude! I had hoped, at least, to discover some new form of animal life,—perhaps of a lower class than any with which we are at present acquainted, but still, some living organism. I found my newly discovered world, if I may so speak, a beautiful chromatic desert.

While I was speculating on the singular arrangements of the internal economy of Nature, with which she so frequently splinters into atoms our most compact theories, I thought I beheld a form moving slowly through the glades of one of the prismatic forests. I looked more attentively, and found that I

was not mistaken. Words cannot depict the anxiety with which I awaited the nearer approach of this mysterious object. Was it merely some inanimate substance, held in suspense in the attenuated atmosphere of the globule? or was it an animal endowed with vitality and motion? It approached, flitting behind the gauzy, colored veils of cloud-foliage, for seconds dimly revealed, then vanishing. At last the violet pennons that trailed nearest to me vibrated; they were gently pushed aside, and the form floated out into the broad light.

It was a female human shape. When I say human, I mean it possessed the outlines of humanity, —but there the analogy ends. Its adorable beauty lifted it illimitable heights beyond the loveliest daughter of Adam.

I cannot, I dare not, attempt to inventory the charms of this divine revelation of perfect beauty. Those eyes of mystic violet, dewy and serene, evade my words. Her long, lustrous hair following her glorious head in a golden wake, like the track sown in heaven by a falling star, seems to quench my most burning phrases with its splendors. If all the bees of Hybla nestled upon my lips, they would still sing but hoarsely the wondrous harmonies of outline that enclosed her form.

She swept out from between the rainbow-curtains of the cloud-trees into the broad sea of light that lay beyond. Her motions were those of some graceful naiad, cleaving, by a mere effort of her will, the clear, unruffled waters that fill the chambers of the

sea. She floated forth with the serene grace of a frail bubble ascending through the still atmosphere of a June day. The perfect roundness of her limbs formed suave and enchanting curves. It was like listening to the most spiritual symphony of Beethoven the divine, to watch the harmonious flow of lines. This, indeed, was a pleasure cheaply purchased at any price. What cared I, if I had waded to the portal of this wonder through another's blood? I would have given my own to enjoy one such moment of intoxication and delight.

Breathless with gazing on this lovely wonder, and forgetful for an instant of everything save her presence, I withdrew my eye from the microscope eagerly,—alas! As my gaze fell on the thin slide that lay beneath my instrument, the bright light from mirror and from prism sparkled on a colorless drop of water! There, in that tiny bead of dew, this beautiful being was forever imprisoned. The planet Neptune was not more distant from me than she. I hastened once more to apply my eye to the microscope.

Animula (let me now call her by that dear name which I subsequently bestowed on her) had changed her position. She had again approached the wondrous forest, and was gazing earnestly upwards. Presently one of the trees—as I must call them—unfolded a long ciliary process, with which it seized one of the gleaming fruits that glittered on its summit, and, sweeping slowly down, held it within reach of Animula. The sylph took it in her delicate hand

and began to eat. My attention was so entirely absorbed by her, that I could not apply myself to the task of determining whether this singular plant was or was not instinct with volition.

I watched her, as she made her repast, with the most profound attention. The suppleness of her motions sent a thrill of delight through my frame; my heart beat madly as she turned her beautiful eyes in the direction of the spot in which I stood. What would I not have given to have had the power to precipitate myself into that luminous ocean, and float with her through those groves of purple and gold! While I was thus breathlessly following her every movement, she suddenly started, seemed to listen for a moment, and then cleaving the brilliant ether in which she was floating, like a flash of light, pierced through the opaline forest, and disappeared.

Instantly a series of the most singular sensations attacked me. It seemed as if I had suddenly gone blind. The luminous sphere was still before me, but my daylight had vanished. What caused this sudden disappearance? Had she a lover or a husband? Yes, that was the solution! Some signal from a happy fellow-being had vibrated through the avenues of the forest, and she had obeyed the summons.

The agony of my sensations, as I arrived at this conclusion, startled me. I tried to reject the conviction that my reason forced upon me. I battled against the fatal conclusion,—but in vain. It was so. I had no escape from it. I loved an animalcule!

It is true that, thanks to the marvellous power of

my microscope, she appeared of human proportions. Instead of presenting the revolting aspect of the coarser creatures, that live and struggle and die, in the more easily resolvable portions of the water-drop, she was fair and delicate and of surpassing beauty. But of what account was all that? Every time that my eye was withdrawn from the instrument, it fell on a miserable drop of water, within which, I must be content to know, dwelt all that could make my life lovely.

Could she but see me once! Could I for one moment pierce the mystical walls that so inexorably rose to separate us, and whisper all that filled my soul, I might consent to be satisfied for the rest of my life with the knowledge of her remote sympathy. It would be something to have established even the faintest personal link to bind us together,—to know that at times, when roaming through those enchanted glades, she might think of the wonderful stranger, who had broken the monotony of her life with his presence, and left a gentle memory in her heart!

But it could not be. No invention of which human intellect was capable could break down the barriers that nature had erected. I might feast my soul upon her wondrous beauty, yet she must always remain ignorant of the adoring eyes that day and night gazed upon her, and, even when closed, beheld her in dreams. With a bitter cry of anguish I fled from the room, and, flinging myself on my bed, sobbed myself to sleep like a child.

CHAPTER VI

THE SPILLING OF THE CUP

I AROSE the next morning almost at daybreak, and rushed to my microscope. I trembled as I sought the luminous world in miniature that contained my all. Animula was there. I had left the gas-lamp, surrounded by its moderators, burning, when I went to bed the night before. I found the sylph bathing, as it were, with an expression of pleasure animating her features, in the brilliant light which surrounded her. She tossed her lustrous golden hair over her shoulders with innocent coquetry. She lay at full length in the transparent medium, in which she supported herself with ease, and gambolled with the enchanting grace that the nymph Salmacis might have exhibited when she sought to conquer the modest Hermaphroditus. I tried an experiment to satisfy myself if her powers of reflection were developed. I lessened the lamp-light considerably. By the dim light that remained, I could see an expression of pain flit across her face. She looked upward suddenly, and her brows contracted. I flooded the stage of the microscope again with a full stream of light, and her whole expression changed. She sprang forward like some substance deprived of all weight. Her eyes sparkled and her lips moved. Ah! if science had only the means of conducting and re-

duplicating sounds, as it does the rays of light, what carols of happiness would then have entranced my ears! what jubilant hymns to Adonïs would have thrilled the illumined air!

I now comprehended how it was that the Count de Gabalis peopled his mystic world with sylphs,—beautiful beings whose breath of life was lambent fire, and who sported forever in regions of purest ether and purest light. The Rosicrucian had anticipated the wonder that I had practically realized.

How long this worship of my strange divinity went on thus I scarcely know. I lost all note of time. All day from early dawn, and far into the night, I was to be found peering through that wonderful lens. I saw no one, went nowhere, and scarce allowed myself sufficient time for my meals. My whole life was absorbed in contemplation as rapt as that of any of the Romish saints. Every hour that I gazed upon the divine form strengthened my passion,—a passion that was always overshadowed by the maddening conviction, that, although I could gaze on her at will, she never, never could behold me!

At length, I grew so pale and emaciated, from want of rest, and continual brooding over my insane love and its cruel conditions, that I determined to make some effort to wean myself from it. "Come," I said, "this is at best but a fantasy. Your imagination has bestowed on Animula charms which in reality she does not possess. Seclusion from female society has produced this morbid condition of mind. Compare her with the beautiful women of your own

world, and this false enchantment will vanish."

I looked over the newspapers by chance. There I beheld the advertisement of a celebrated *danseuse* who appeared nightly at Niblo's. The Signorina Caradolce had the reputation of being the most beautiful as well as the most graceful woman in the world. I instantly dressed and went to the theatre.

The curtain drew up. The usual semicircle of fairies in white muslin were standing on the right toe around the enamelled flower-bank, of green canvas, on which the belated prince was sleeping. Suddenly a flute is heard. The fairies start. The trees open, the fairies all stand on the left toe, and the queen enters. It was the Signorina. She bounded forward amid thunders of applause, and, lighting on one foot, remained poised in air. Heavens! was this the great enchantress that had drawn monarchs at her chariot-wheels? Those heavy muscular limbs, those thick ankles, those cavernous eyes, that stereotyped smile, those crudely painted cheeks! Where were the vermeil blooms, the liquid expressive eyes, the harmonious limbs of Animula?

The Signorina danced. What gross, discordant movements! The play of her limbs was all false and artificial. Her bounds were painful athletic efforts; her poses were angular and distressed the eye. I could bear it no longer; with an exclamation of disgust that drew every eye upon me, I rose from my seat in the very middle of the Signorina's *pas-de-fascination,* and abruptly quitted the house.

I hastened home to feast my eyes once more on

the lovely form of my sylph. I felt that henceforth to combat this passion would be impossible. I applied my eye to the lens. Animula was there,—but what could have happened? Some terrible change seemed to have taken place during my absence. Some secret grief seemed to cloud the lovely features of her I gazed upon. Her face had grown thin and haggard; her limbs trailed heavily; the wondrous lustre of her golden hair had faded. She was ill!—ill, and I could not assist her! I believe at that moment I would have gladly forfeited all claims to my human birthright, if I could only have been dwarfed to the size of an animalcule, and permitted to console her from whom fate had forever divided me.

I racked my brain for the solution of this mystery. What was it that afflicted the sylph? She seemed to suffer intense pain. Her features contracted, and she even writhed, as if with some internal agony. The wondrous forests appeared also to have lost half their beauty. Their hues were dim and in some places faded away altogether. I watched Animula for hours with a breaking heart, and she seemed absolutely to wither away under my very eye. Suddenly I remembered that I had not looked at the water-drop for several days. In fact, I hated to see it; for it reminded me of the natural barrier between Animula and myself. I hurriedly looked down on the stage of the microscope. The slide was still there,—but, great heavens! the water-drop had vanished! The awful truth burst upon me; it had evaporated, until it had become so minute as to be in-

visible to the naked eye; I had been gazing on its last atom, the one that contained Animula,—and she was dying!

I rushed again to the front of the lens, and looked through. Alas! the last agony had seized her. The rainbow-hued forests had all melted away, and Animula lay struggling feebly in what seemed to be a spot of dim light. Ah! the sight was horrible: the limbs once so round and lovely shrivelling up into nothings; the eyes—those eyes that shone like heaven—being quenched into black dust; the lustrous golden hair now lank and discolored. The last throe came. I beheld that final struggle of the blackening form—and I fainted.

When I awoke out of a trance of many hours, I found myself lying amid the wreck of my instrument, myself as shattered in mind and body as it. I crawled feebly to my bed, from which I did not rise for months.

They say now that I am mad; but they are mistaken. I am poor, for I have neither the heart nor the will to work; all my money is spent, and I live on charity. Young men's associations that love a joke invite me to lecture on Optics before them, for which they pay me, and laugh at me while I lecture. "Linley, the mad microscopist," is the name I go by. I suppose that I talk incoherently while I lecture. Who could talk sense when his brain is haunted by such ghastly memories, while ever and anon among the shapes of death I behold the radiant form of my lost Animula!

THE WONDERSMITH

CHAPTER I

GOLOSH STREET AND ITS PEOPLE

A SMALL lane, the name of which I have forgotten, or do not choose to remember, slants suddenly off from Chatham Street, (before that headlong thoroughfare rushes into the Park,) and retreats suddenly down towards the East River, as if it were disgusted with the smell of old clothes, and had determined to wash itself clean. This excellent intention it has, however, evidently contributed towards the making of that imaginary pavement mentioned in the old adage; for it is still emphatically a dirty street. It has never been able to shake off the Hebraic taint of filth which it inherits from the ancestral thoroughfare. It is slushy and greasy, as if it were twin brother of the Roman Ghetto.

I like a dirty slum; not because I am naturally unclean,—I have not a drop of Neapolitan blood in my veins,—but because I generally find a certain sediment of philosophy precipitated in its gutters. A clean street is terribly prosaic. There is no food for thought in carefully swept pavements, barren kennels, and vulgarly spotless houses. But when I go down a street which has been left so long to itself that it has acquired a distinct outward character, I find plenty to think about. The scraps of sodden

letters lying in the ash-barrel have their meaning: desperate appeals, perhaps, from Tom, the baker's assistant, to Amelia, the daughter of the dry-goods retailer, who is always selling at a sacrifice in consequence of the late fire. That may be Tom himself who is now passing me in a white apron, and I look up at the windows of the house (which does not, however, give any signs of a recent conflagration) and almost hope to see Amelia wave a white pocket-handkerchief. The bit of orange-peel lying on the sidewalk inspires thought. Who will fall over it? who but the industrious mother of six children, the youngest of which is only nine months old, all of whom are dependent on her exertions for support? I see her slip and tumble. I see the pale face convulsed with agony, and the vain struggle to get up; the pitying crowd closing her off from all air; the anxious young doctor who happened to be passing by; the manipulation of the broken limb, the shake of the head, the moan of the victim, the litter borne on men's shoulders, the gates of the New York Hospital unclosing, the subscription taken up on the spot. There is some food for speculation in that three-year-old, tattered child, masked with dirt, who is throwing a brick at another three-year-old, tattered child, masked with dirt. It is not difficult to perceive that he is destined to lurk, as it were, through life. His bad, flat face—or, at least, what can be seen of it—does not look as if it were made for the light of day. The mire in which he wallows now is but a type of the moral mire in which he will wallow here-

after. The feeble little hand lifted at this instant to smite his companion, half in earnest, half in jest, will be raised against his fellow-beings forevermore.

Golosh Street—as I will call this nameless lane before alluded to—is an interesting locality. All the oddities of trade seemed to have found their way thither and made an eccentric mercantile settlement. There is a bird-shop at one corner wainscoted with little cages containing linnets, wax-wings, canaries, blackbirds, Minobirds, with a hundred other varieties, known only to naturalists. Immediately opposite is an establishment where they sell nothing but ornaments made out of the tinted leaves of autumn, varnished and gummed into various forms. Further down is a second-hand book-stall, which looks like a sentry-box mangled out flat, and which is remarkable for not containing a complete set of any work. There is a small chink between two ordinary-sized houses, in which a little Frenchman makes and sells artificial eyes, specimens of which, ranged on a black velvet cushion, stare at you unwinkingly through the window as you pass, until you shudder and hurry on, thinking how awful the world would be if every one went about without eyelids. There are junk-shops in Golosh Street that seem to have got hold of all the old nails in the ark and all the old brass of Corinth. Madame Filomel, the fortune-teller, lives at No. 12 Golosh Street, second story front, pull the bell on the left-hand side. Next door to Madame is the shop of Herr Hippe, commonly called the Wondersmith.

Herr Hippe's shop is the largest in Golosh Street, and to all appearance is furnished with the smallest stock. Beyond a few packing-cases, a turner's lathe, and a shelf laden with dissected maps of Europe, the interior of the shop is entirely unfurnished. The window, which is lofty and wide, but much begrimed with dirt, contains the only pleasant object in the place. This is a beautiful little miniature theatre,—that is to say, the orchestra and stage. It is fitted with charmingly painted scenery and all the appliances for scenic changes. There are tiny traps, and delicately constructed "lifts," and real footlights fed with burning-fluid, and in the orchestra sits a diminutive conductor before his desk, surrounded by musical manikins, all provided with the smallest of violoncellos, flutes, oboes, drums, and such like. There are characters also on the stage. A Templar in a white cloak is dragging a fainting female form to the parapet of a ruined bridge, while behind a great black rock on the left one can see a man concealed, who, kneeling, levels an arquebuse at the knight's heart. But the orchestra is silent; the conductor never beats the time, the musicians never play a note; the Templar never drags his victim an inch nearer to the bridge; the masked avenger takes an eternal aim with his weapon. This repose appears unnatural; for so admirably are the figures executed that they seem replete with life. One is almost led to believe, in looking on them, that they are resting beneath some spell which hinders their motion. One expects every moment to hear the loud

explosion of the arquebuse,—to see the blue smoke curling, the Templar falling,—to hear the orchestra playing the requiem of the guilty.

Few people knew what Herr Hippe's business or trade really was. That he worked at something was evident; else why the shop? Some people inclined to the belief that he was an inventor, or mechanician. His workshop was in the rear of the store, and into that sanctuary no one but himself had admission. He arrived in Golosh Street, eight or ten years ago, and one fine morning, the neighbors, taking down their shutters, observed that No. 13 had got a tenant. A tall, thin, sallow-faced man stood on a ladder outside the shop entrance, nailing up a large board, on which "Herr Hippe, Wondersmith," was painted in black letters on a yellow ground. The little theatre stood in the window, where it stood ever after, and Herr Hippe was established.

But what was a Wondersmith? people asked each other. No one could reply. Madame Filomel was consulted; but she looked grave, and said that it was none of her business. Mr. Pippel, the bird-fancier, who was a German, and ought to know best, thought it was the English for some singular Teutonic profession; but his replies were so vague that Golosh Street was as unsatisfied as ever. Solon, the little humpback, who kept the odd-volume book-stall at the lowest corner, could throw no light upon it. And at length people had to come to the conclusion that Herr Hippe was either a coiner or a magician, and opinions were divided.

CHAPTER II

A BOTTLEFUL OF SOULS

It was a dull December evening. There was little trade doing in Golosh Street, and the shutters were up at most of the shops. Hippe's store had been closed at least an hour, and the Mino-birds and Bohemian wax-wings at Mr. Pippel's had their heads tucked under their wings in their first sleep.

Herr Hippe sat in his parlor, which was lit by a pleasant wood-fire. There were no candles in the room, and the flickering blaze played fantastic tricks on the pale gray walls. It seemed the festival of shadows. Processions of shapes, obscure and indistinct, passed across the leaden-hued panels and vanished in the dusk corners. Every fresh blaze flung up by the wayward logs created new images. Now it was a funeral throng, with the bowed figures of mourners, the shrouded coffin, the plumes that waved like extinguished torches; now a knightly cavalcade with flags and lances, and weird horses, that rushed silently along until they met the angle of the room, when they pranced through the wall and vanished.

On a table close to where Herr Hippe sat was placed a large square box of some dark wood, while over it was spread a casing of steel, so elaborately wrought in an open arabesque pattern that it seemed

like a shining blue lace which was lightly stretched over its surface.

Herr Hippe lay luxuriously in his arm-chair, looking meditatively into the fire. He was tall and thin, and his skin was of a dull saffron hue. Long, straight hair, sharply cut, regular features, a long, thin mustache, that curled like a dark asp around his mouth, the expression of which was so bitter and cruel that it seemed to distil the venom of the ideal serpent, and a bony, muscular form, were the prominent characteristics of the Wondersmith.

The profound silence that reigned in the chamber was broken by a peculiar scratching at the panel of the door, like that which at the French court was formerly substituted for the ordinary knock, when it was necessary to demand admission to the royal apartments. Herr Hippe started, raised his head, which vibrated on his long neck like the head of a cobra when about to strike, and after a moment's silence uttered a strange guttural sound. The door unclosed, and a squat, broad-shouldered woman, with large, wild, oriental eyes, entered softly.

"Ah! Filomel, you are come!" said the Wondersmith, sinking back in his chair. "Where are the rest of them?"

"They will be here presently," answered Madame Filomel, seating herself in an arm-chair much too narrow for a person of her proportions, and over the sides of which she bulged like a pudding.

"Have you brought the souls?" asked the Wondersmith.

"They are here," said the fortune-teller, drawing a large pot-bellied black bottle from under her cloak. "Ah! I have had such trouble with them!"

"Are they of the right brand,—wild, tearing, dark, devilish fellows? We want no essence of milk and honey, you know. None but souls bitter as hemlock or scorching as lightning will suit our purpose."

"You will see, you will see, Grand Duke of Egypt! They are ethereal demons, every one of them. They are the pick of a thousand births. Do you think that I, old midwife that I am, don't know the squall of the demon child from that of the angel child, the very moment they are delivered? Ask a musician how he knows, even in the dark, a note struck by Thalberg from one struck by Liszt!"

"I long to test them," cried the Wondersmith, rubbing his hands joyfully. "I long to see how the little devils will behave when I give them their shapes. Ah! it will be a proud day for us when we let them loose upon the cursed Christian children! Through the length and breadth of the land they will go; wherever our wandering people set foot, and wherever they are, the children of the Christians shall die. Then we, the despised Bohemians, the gypsies, as they call us, will be once more lords of the earth, as we were in the days when the accursed things called cities did not exist, and men lived in the free woods and hunted the game of the forest. Toys indeed! Ay, ay, we will give the little dears toys! toys that all day will sleep calmly in their

boxes, seemingly stiff and wooden and without life, —but at night, when the souls enter them, will arise and surround the cots of the sleeping children, and pierce their hearts with their keen, envenomed blades! Toys indeed! Oh, yes! I will sell them toys!"

And the Wondersmith laughed horribly, while the snaky mustache on his upper lip writhed as if it had truly a serpent's power and could sting.

"Have you got your first batch, Herr Hippe?" asked Madame Filomel. "Are they all ready?"

"Oh ay! they are ready," answered the Wondersmith with gusto,—opening, as he spoke, the box covered with the blue steel lace-work; "they are here."

The box contained a quantity of exquisitely carved wooden manikins of both sexes, painted with great dexterity so as to present a miniature resemblance to nature. They were, in fact, nothing more than admirable specimens of those toys which children delight in placing in various positions on the table,— in regiments, or sitting at meals, or grouped under the stiff green trees which always accompany them in the boxes in which they are sold at the toy-shops.

The peculiarity, however, about the manikins of Herr Hippe was not alone the artistic truth with which the limbs and the features were gifted; but on the countenance of each little puppet the carver's art had wrought an expression of wickedness that was appalling. Every tiny face had its special stamp of ferocity. The lips were thin and brimful of

malice; the small black bead-like eyes glittered with the fire of a universal hate. There was not one of the manikins, male or female, that did not hold in his or her hand some miniature weapon. The little men, scowling like demons, clasped in their wooden fingers swords delicate as a housewife's needle. The women, whose countenances expressed treachery and cruelty, clutched infinitesimal daggers, with which they seemed about to take some terrible vengeance.

"Good!" said Madame Filomel, taking one of the manikins out of the box and examining it attentively; "you work well, Duke Balthazar! These little ones are of the right stamp; they look as if they had mischief in them. Ah! here come our brothers."

At this moment the same scratching that preceded the entrance of Madame Filomel was heard at the door, and Herr Hippe replied with a hoarse, guttural cry. The next moment two men entered. The first was a small man with very brilliant eyes. He was wrapt in a long shabby cloak, and wore a strange nondescript species of cap on his head, such a cap as one sees only in the low billiard-rooms in Paris. His companion was tall, long-limbed, and slender; and his dress, although of the ordinary cut, either from the disposition of colors, or from the careless, graceful attitudes of the wearer, assumed a certain air of picturesqueness. Both the men possessed the same marked oriental type of countenance which distinguished the Wondersmith and Madame Filomel. True gypsies they seemed, who would not have been

out of place telling fortunes, or stealing chickens in the green lanes of England, or wandering with their wild music and their sleight-of-hand tricks through Bohemian villages.

"Welcome, brothers!" said the Wondersmith; "you are in time. Sister Filomel has brought the souls, and we are about to test them. Monsieur Kerplonne, take off your cloak. Brother Oaksmith, take a chair. I promise you some amusement this evening; so make yourselves comfortable. Here is something to aid you."

And while the Frenchman Kerplonne, and his tall companion, Oaksmith, were obeying Hippe's invitation, he reached over to a little closet let into the wall, and took thence a squat bottle and some glasses, which he placed on the table.

"Drink, brothers!" he said; "it is not Christian blood, but good stout wine of Oporto. It goes right to the heart, and warms one like the sunshine of the south."

"It is good," said Kerplonne, smacking his lips with enthusiasm.

"Why don't you keep brandy? Hang wine!" cried Oaksmith, after having swallowed two bumpers in rapid succession.

"Bah! Brandy has been the ruin of our race. It has made us sots and thieves. It shall never cross my threshold," cried the Wondersmith, with a sombre indignation.

"A little of it is not bad, though, Duke," said the fortune-teller. "It consoles us for our misfortunes;

it gives us the crowns we once wore; it restores to us the power we once wielded; it carries us back, as if by magic, to that land of the sun from which fate has driven us; it darkens the memory of all the evils that we have for centuries suffered."

"It is a devil; may it be cursed!" cried Herr Hippe, passionately. "It is a demon that stole from me my son, the finest youth in all Courland. Yes! my son, the son of the Waywode Balthazar, Grand Duke of Lower Egypt, died raving in a gutter, with an empty brandy-bottle in his hands. Were it not that the plant is a sacred one to our race, I would curse the grape and the vine that bore it."

This outburst was delivered with such energy that the three gypsies kept silence. Oaksmith helped himself to another glass of port, and the fortune-teller rocked to and fro in her chair, too much overawed by the Wondersmith's vehemence of manner to reply. The little Frenchman, Kerplonne, took no part in the discussion, but seemed lost in admiration of the manikins, which he took from the box in which they lay, handling them with the greatest care.

After the silence had lasted for about a minute, Herr Hippe broke it with the sudden question, "How does your eye get on, Kerplonne?"

"Excellently, Duke. It is finished. I have it here." And the little Frenchman put his hand into his breeches pocket and pulled out a large artificial human eye. Its great size was the only thing in this eye that would lead any one to suspect its artificiality. It was at least twice the size of life; but there

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was a fearful speculative light in its iris, which seemed to expand and contract like the eye of a living being, that rendered it a horrible staring paradox. It looked like the naked eye of the Cyclops, torn from his forehead, and still burning with wrath and the desire for vengeance.

The little Frenchman laughed pleasantly as he held the eye in his hand, and gazed down on that huge, dark pupil, that stared back at him, it seemed, with an air of defiance and mistrust.

"It is a devil of an eye," said the little man, wiping the enamelled surface with an old silk pocket-handkerchief; "it reads like a demon. My niece—the unhappy one—has a wretch of a lover, and I have a long time feared that she would run away with him. I could not read her correspondence, for she kept her writing-desk closely locked. But I asked her yesterday to keep this eye in some very safe place for me. She put it, as I knew she would, into her desk, and by its aid I read every one of her letters. She was to run away next Monday, the ungrateful! but she will find herself disappointed."

And the little man laughed heartily at the success of his stratagem, and polished and fondled the great eye until that optic seemed to grow sore with rubbing.

"And you have been at work, too, I see, Herr Hippe. Your manikins are excellent. But where are the souls?"

"In that bottle," answered the Wondersmith, pointing to the pot-bellied black bottle that Madame

Filomel had brought with her. "Yes, Monsieur Kerplonne," he continued, "my manikins are well made. I invoked the aid of Abigor, the demon of soldiery, and he inspired me. The little fellows will be famous assassins when they are animated. We will try them to-night."

"Good!" cried Kerplonne, rubbing his hands joyously. "It is close upon New Year's day. We will fabricate millions of the little murderers by New Year's eve, and sell them in large quantities; and when the households are all asleep, and the Christian children are waiting for Santa Claus to come, the small ones will troop from their boxes, and the Christian children will die. It is famous! Health to Abigor!"

"Let us try them at once," said Oaksmith. "Is your daughter, Zonéla, in bed, Herr Hippe? Are we secure from intrusion?"

"No one is stirring about the house," replied the Wondersmith, gloomily.

Filomel leaned over to Oaksmith, and said in an undertone, "Why do you mention his daughter? You know he does not like to have her spoken about."

"I will take care that we are not disturbed," said Kerplonne, rising. "I will put my eye outside the door, to watch."

He went to the door and placed his great eye upon the floor with tender care. As he did so, a dark form, unseen by him or his second vision, glided along the passage noiselessly, and was lost in the darkness.

"Now for it!" exclaimed Madame Filomel, taking up her fat black bottle. "Herr Hippe, prepare your manikins!"

The Wondersmith took the little dolls out, one by one, and set them upon the table. Such an array of villainous countenances was never seen. An army of Italian bravoes, seen through the wrong end of a telescope, or a band of prisoners at the galleys in Liliput, will give some faint idea of the appearance they presented. While Madame Filomel uncorked the black bottle, Herr Hippe covered the dolls with a species of linen tent, which he took also from the box. This done, the fortune-teller held the mouth of the bottle to the door of the tent, gathering the loose cloth closely round the glass neck. Immediately tiny noises were heard inside the tent. Madame Filomel removed the bottle, and the Wondersmith lifted the covering in which he had enveloped his little people.

A wonderful transformation had taken place. Wooden and inflexible no longer, the crowd of manikins were now in full motion. The bead-like eyes turned, glittering, on all sides; the thin, wicked lips quivered with bad passions; the tiny hands sheathed and unsheathed the little swords and daggers. Episodes, common to life, were taking place in every direction. Here two martial manikins paid court to a pretty, sly-faced female, who smiled on each alternately, but gave her hand to be kissed to a third manikin, an ugly little scoundrel, who crouched behind her. There a pair of friendly dolls walked

arm in arm, apparently on the best terms, while, all the time, one was watching his opportunity to stab the other in the back.

"I think they'll do," said the Wondersmith, chuckling as he watched these various incidents. "Treacherous, cruel, bloodthirsty. All goes marvellously well. But stay! I will put the grand test to them."

So saying, he drew a gold dollar from his pocket, and let it fall on the table, in the very midst of the throng of manikins. It had hardly touched the table when there was a pause on all sides. Every head was turned towards the dollar. Then about twenty of the little creatures rushed towards the glittering coin. One, fleeter than the rest, leaped upon it and drew his sword. The entire crowd of little people had now gathered round this new centre of attraction. Men and women struggled and shoved to get nearer to the piece of gold. Hardly had the first Liliputian mounted upon the treasure, when a hundred blades flashed back a defiant answer to his, and a dozen men, sword in hand, leaped upon the yellow platform and drove him off at the sword's point. Then commenced a general battle. The miniature faces were convulsed with rage and avarice. Each furious doll tried to plunge dagger or sword into his or her neighbor, and the women seemed possessed by a thousand devils.

"They will break themselves into atoms," cried Filomel, as she watched with eagerness this savage *mêlée*. "You had better gather them up, Herr

Hippe. I will exhaust my bottle and suck all the souls back from them."

"O, they are perfect devils! they are magnificent little demons!" cried the Frenchman, with enthusiasm. "Hippe, you are a wonderful man. Brother Oaksmith, you have no such man as Hippe among your English gypsies."

"Not exactly," answered Oaksmith, rather sullenly, "not exactly. But we have men there who can make a twelve-year-old horse look like a four-year-old,—and who can take you and Herr Hippe up with one hand, and throw you over their shoulders."

"The good God forbid!" said the little Frenchman. "I do not love such play. It is incommodious."

While Oaksmith and Kerplonne were talking, the Wondersmith had placed the linen tent over the struggling dolls, and Madame Filomel, who had been performing some mysterious manipulations with her black bottle, put the mouth once more to the door of the tent. In an instant the confused murmur within ceased. Madame Filomel corked the bottle quickly. The Wondersmith withdrew the tent, and, lo! the furious dolls were once more wooden-jointed and inflexible; and the old sinister look was again frozen on their faces.

"They must have blood, though," said Herr Hippe, as he gathered them up and put them into their box. "Mr. Pippel, the bird-fancier, is asleep. I have a key that opens his door. We will let them loose among the birds; it will be rare fun."

"Magnificent!" cried Kerplonne. "Let us go on the instant. But first let me gather up my eye."

The Frenchman pocketed his eye, after having given it a polish with the silk handkerchief; Herr Hippe extinguished the lamp; Oaksmith took a last bumper of port; and the four gypsies departed for Mr. Pippel's, carrying the box of manikins with them.

CHAPTER III

SOLON

THE shadow that glided along the dark corridor, at the moment that Monsieur Kerplonne deposited his sentinel eye outside the door of the Wondersmith's apartment, sped swiftly through the passage and ascended the stairs to the attic. Here the shadow stopped at the entrance to one of the chambers and knocked at the door. There was no reply.

"Zonéla, are you asleep?" said the shadow, softly.

"O, Solon, is it you?" replied a sweet low voice from within. "I thought it was Herr Hippe. Come in."

The shadow opened the door and entered. There were neither candles nor lamp in the room; but through the projecting window, which was open, there came the faint gleams of the starlight, by which one could distinguish a female figure seated on a low stool in the middle of the floor.

"Has he left you without light again, Zonéla?" asked the shadow, closing the door of the apartment. "I have brought my little lantern with me, though."

"Thank you, Solon," answered she called Zonéla; "you are a good fellow. He never gives me any light of an evening, but bids me go to bed. I like to

sit sometimes and look at the moon and the stars,—the stars more than all; for they seem all the time to look right back into my face, very sadly, as if they would say, 'We see you, and pity you, and would help you, if we could.' But it is so mournful to be always looking at such myriads of melancholy eyes! and I long so to read those nice books that you lend me, Solon!"

By this time the shadow had lit the lantern and was a shadow no longer. A large head, covered with a profusion of long blonde hair, which was cut after that fashion known as *á l'enfants d'Edouard;* a beautiful pale face, lit with wide, blue, dreamy eyes; long arms and slender hands, attenuated legs, and—an enormous hump;—such was Solon, the shadow. As soon as the humpback had lit the lamp, Zonéla arose from the low stool on which she had been seated, and took Solon's hand affectionately in hers.

Zonéla was surely not of gypsy blood. That rich auburn hair, that looked almost black in the lamplight, that pale, transparent skin, tinged with an under-glow of warm rich blood, the hazel eyes, large and soft as those of a fawn, were never begotten of a Zingaro. Zonéla was seemingly about sixteen; her figure, although somewhat thin and angular, was full of the unconscious grace of youth. She was dressed in an old cotton print, which had been once of an exceedingly boisterous pattern, but was now a mere suggestion of former splendor; while round her head was twisted, in fantastic fashion, a silk handkerchief of green ground spotted with bright

crimson. This strange head-dress gave her an elfish appearance.

"I have been out all day with the organ, and I am so tired, Solon!—not sleepy, but weary, I mean. Poor Furbelow was sleepy, though, and he's gone to bed."

"I'm weary, too, Zonéla;—not weary as you are, though, for I sit in my little book-stall all day long, and do not drag round an organ and a monkey and play old tunes for pennies,—but weary of myself, of life, of the load that I carry on my shoulders"; and, as he said this, the poor humpback glanced sideways, as if to call attention to his deformed person.

"Well, but you ought not to be melancholy amidst your books, Solon. Gracious! If I could only sit in the sun and read as you do, how happy I should be! But it's very tiresome to trudge round all day with that nasty organ, and look up at the houses, and know that you are annoying the people inside; and then the boys play such bad tricks on poor Furbelow, throwing him hot pennies to pick up, and burning his poor little hands; and oh! sometimes, Solon, the men in the street make me so afraid,—they speak to me and look at me so oddly!—I'd a greát deal rather sit in your book-stall and read."

"I have nothing but odd volumes in my stall," answered the humpback. "Perhaps that's right, though; for, after all, I'm nothing but an odd volume myself."

"Come, don't be melancholy, Solon. Sit down and tell me a story. I'll bring Furbelow to listen."

So saying, she went to a dusk corner of the cheerless attic room, and returned with a little Brazilian monkey in her arms,—a poor, mild, drowsy thing, that looked as if it had cried itself to sleep. She sat down on her little stool, with Furbelow in her lap, and nodded her head to Solon, as much as to say, "Go on; we are attentive."

"You want a story, do you?" said the humpback, with a mournful smile. "Well, I'll tell you one. Only what will your father say, if he catches me here?"

"Herr Hippe is not my father," cried Zonéla, indignantly. "He's a gypsy, and I know I'm stolen; and I'd run away from him, if I only knew where to run to. If I were his child, do you think that he would treat me as he does? make me trudge round the city all day long, with a barrel-organ and a monkey,—though I love poor, dear little Furbelow, —and keep me up in a garret, and give me ever so little to eat? I know I'm not his child, for he hates me."

"Listen to my story, Zonéla, and we'll talk of that afterwards. Let me sit at your feet";—and, having coiled himself up at the little maiden's feet, he commenced:—

"There once lived in a great city, just like this city of New York, a poor little hunchback. He kept a second-hand book-stall, where he made barely enough money to keep body and soul together. He was very sad at times, because he knew scarce any one, and those that he did know did not love him.

He had passed a sickly, secluded youth. The children of his neighborhood would not play with him, for he was not made like them; and the people in the streets stared at him with pity, or scoffed at him when he went by. Ah! Zonéla, how his poor heart was wrung with bitterness when he beheld the procession of shapely men and fine women that every day passed him by in the thoroughfares of the great city! How he repined and cursed his fate as the torrent of fleet-footed firemen dashed past him to the toll of the bells, magnificent in their overflowing vitality and strength! But there was one consolation left him,—one drop of honey in the jar of gall, so sweet that it ameliorated all the bitterness of life. God had given him a deformed body, but his mind was straight and healthy. So the poor hunchback shut himself into the world of books, and was, if not happy, at least contented. He kept company with courteous paladins, and romantic heroes, and beautiful women; and this society was of such excellent breeding that it never so much as once noticed his poor crooked back or his lame walk. The love of books grew upon him with his years. He was remarked for his studious habits; and when, one day, the obscure people that he called father and mother —parents only in name—died, a compassionate book-vender gave him enough stock in trade to set up a little stall of his own. Here, in his book-stall, he sat in the sun all day, waiting for the customers that seldom came, and reading the fine deeds of the people of the ancient time, or the beautiful thoughts

of the poets that had warmed millions of hearts before that hour, and still glowed for him with undiminished fire. One day, when he was reading some book, that, small as it was, was big enough to shut the whole world out from him, he heard some music in the street. Looking up from his book, he saw a little girl, with large eyes, playing an organ, while a monkey begged for alms from a crowd of idlers who had nothing in their pockets but their hands. The girl was playing, but she was also weeping. The merry notes of the polka were ground out to a silent accompaniment of tears. She looked very sad, this organ-girl, and her monkey seemed to have caught the infection, for his large brown eyes were moist, as if he also wept. The poor hunchback was struck with pity, and called the little girl over to give her a penny,—not, dear Zonéla, because he wished to bestow alms, but because he wanted to speak with her. She came, and they talked together. She came the next day,—for it turned out that they were neighbors,—and the next, and, in short, every day. They became friends. They were both lonely and afflicted, with this difference, that she was beautiful, and he—was a hunchback."

"Why, Solon," cried Zonéla, "that's the very way you and I met!"

"It was then," continued Solon, with a faint smile, "that life seemed to have its music. A great harmony seemed to the poor cripple to fill the world. The carts that took the flour-barrels from the wharves to the store-houses seemed to emit joyous

melodies from their wheels. The hum of the great business streets sounded like grand symphonies of triumph. As one who has been travelling through a barren country without much heed feels with singular force the sterility of the lands he has passed through when he reaches the fertile plains that lie at the end of his journey, so the humpback, after his vision had been freshened with this blooming flower, remembered for the first time the misery of the life that he had led. But he did not allow himself to dwell upon the past. The present was so delightful that it occupied all his thoughts. Zonéla, he was in love with the organ-girl."

"O, that's so nice!" said Zonéla, innocently,—pinching poor Furbelow, as she spoke, in order to dispel a very evident snooze that was creeping over him. "It's going to be a love-story."

"Ah! but, Zonéla, he did not know whether she loved him in return. You forget that he was deformed."

"But," answered the girl gravely, "he was good."

A light like the flash of an aurora illuminated Solon's face for an instant. He put out his hand suddenly, as if to take Zonéla's and press it to his heart; but an unaccountable timidity seemed to arrest the impulse, and he only stroked Furbelow's head,—upon which that individual opened one large brown eye to the extent of the eighth of an inch, and, seeing that it was only Solon, instantly closed it again, and resumed his dream of a city where

there were no organs and all the copper coin of the realm was iced.

"He hoped and feared," continued Solon, in a low, mournful voice; "but at times he was very miserable, because he did not think it possible that so much happiness was reserved for him as the love of this beautiful, innocent girl. At night, when he was in bed, and all the world was dreaming, he lay awake looking up at the old books against the walls, thinking how he could bring about the charming of her heart. One night, when he was thinking of this, with his eyes fixed upon the mouldy backs of the odd volumes that lay on their shelves, and looked back at him wistfully, as if they would say, 'We also are like you, and wait to be completed,' it seemed as if he heard a rustle of leaves. Then, one by one, the books came down from their places to the floor, as if shifted by invisible hands, opened their worm-eaten covers, and from between the pages of each the hunchback saw issue forth a curious throng of little people that danced here and there through the apartment. Each one of these little creatures was shaped so as to bear resemblance to some one of the letters of the alphabet. One tall, long-legged fellow seemed like the letter A; a burly fellow, with a big head and a paunch, was the model of B; another leering little chap might have passed for a Q; and so on through the whole. These fairies—for fairies they were—climbed upon the hunchback's bed, and clustered thick as bees upon his pillow. 'Come!' they cried to him, 'we will lead you into fairy-land.'

So saying, they seized his hand, and he suddenly found himself in a beautiful country, where the light did not come from sun or moon or stars, but floated round and over and in everything like the atmosphere. On all sides he heard mysterious melodies sung by strangely musical voices. None of the features of the landscape was definite; yet when he looked on the vague harmonies of color that melted one into another before his sight he was filled with a sense of inexplicable beauty. On every side of him fluttered radiant bodies, which darted to and fro through the illumined space. They were not birds, yet they flew like birds; and as each one crossed the path of his vision he felt a strange delight flash through his brain, and straightway an interior voice seemed to sing beneath the vaulted dome of his temples a verse containing some beautiful thought. The little fairies were all this time dancing and fluttering around him, perching on his head, on his shoulders, or balancing themselves on his finger-tips. 'Where am I?' he asked, at last, of his friends, the fairies. 'Ah, Solon!' he heard them whisper, in tones that sounded like the distant tinkling of silver bells, 'this land is nameless; but those whom we lead hither, who tread its soil, and breathe its air, and gaze on its floating sparks of light, are poets forevermore.' Having said this, they vanished, and with them the beautiful indefinite land, and the flashing lights, and the illumined air; and the hunchback found himself again in bed, with the

moonlight quivering on the floor, and the dusty books on their shelves, grim and mouldy as ever."

"You have betrayed yourself. You called yourself Solon," cried Zonéla. "Was it a dream?"

"I do not know," answered Solon; "but since that night I have been a poet."

"A poet?" screamed the little organ girl,—"a real poet, who makes verses which every one reads and every one talks of?"

"The people call me a poet," answered Solon, with a sad smile. "They do not know me by the name of Solon, for I write under an assumed title; but they praise me, and repeat my songs. But Zonéla, I can't sing this load off my back, can I?"

"O, bother the hump!" said Zonéla, jumping up suddenly. "You're a poet, and that's enough, isn't it? I'm so glad you're a poet, Solon! You must repeat all your best things to me, won't you?"

Solon nodded assent.

"You don't ask me," he said, "who was the little girl that the hunchback loved."

Zonéla's face flushed crimson. She turned suddenly away, and ran into a dark corner of the room. In a moment she returned with an old hand-organ in her arms.

"Play, Solon, play!" she cried. "I am so glad that I want to dance. Furbelow, come and dance in honor of Solon the Poet."

It was her confession. Solon's eyes flamed, as if his brain had suddenly ignited. He said nothing; but a triumphant smile broke over his countenance.

Zonéla, the twilight of whose cheeks was still rosy with the setting blush, caught the lazy Furbelow by his little paws; Solon turned the crank of the organ, which wheezed out as merry a polka as its asthma would allow, and the girl and the monkey commenced their fantastic dance. They had taken but a few steps when the door suddenly opened, and the tall figure of the Wondersmith appeared on the threshold. His face was convulsed with rage, and the black snake that quivered on his upper lip seemed to rear itself as if about to spring upon the hunchback.

CHAPTER IV

THE MANIKINS AND THE MINOS

THE four gypsies left Herr Hippe's house cautiously, and directed their steps towards Mr. Pippel's bird-shop. Golosh Street was asleep. Nothing was stirring in that tenebrous slum, save a dog that savagely gnawed a bone which lay on a dust-heap, tantalizing him with the flavor of food without its substance. As the gypsies moved stealthily along in the darkness they had a sinister and murderous air that would not have failed to attract the attention of the policeman of the quarter, if that worthy had not at the moment been comfortably ensconced in the neighboring "Rainbow" bar-room, listening to the improvisations of that talented vocalist, Mr. Harrison, who was making impromptu verses on every possible subject, to the accompaniment of a cithern which was played by a sad little Italian in a large cloak, to whom the host of the "Rainbow" gave so many toddies and a dollar for his nightly performance.

Mr. Pippel's shop was but a short distance from the Wondersmith's house. A few moments, therefore, brought the gypsy party to the door, when, by the aid of a key which Herr Hippe produced, they silently slipped into the entry. Here the Wonder-

smith took a dark-lantern from under his cloak, removed the cap that shrouded the light, and led the way into the shop, which was separated from the entry only by a glass door, that yielded, like the outer one, to a key which Hippe took from his pocket. The four gypsies now entered the shop and closed the door behind them.

It was a little world of birds. On every side, whether in large or small cages, one beheld balls of various-colored feathers standing on one leg and breathing peacefully. Love-birds, nestling shoulder to shoulder, with their heads tucked under their wings and all their feathers puffed out, so that they looked like globes of malachite; English bullfinches, with ashen-colored backs, in which their black heads were buried, and corselets of a rosy down; Java sparrows, fat and sleek and cleanly; troupials, so glossy and splendid in plumage that they looked as if they were dressed in the celebrated armor of the Black Prince, which was jet, richly damascened with gold; a cock of the rock, gleaming, a ball of tawny fire, like a setting sun; the campanero of Brazil, white as snow, with his dilatable tolling-tube hanging from his head, placid and silent;—these, with a humbler crowd of linnets, canaries, robins, mocking-birds, and phœbes, slumbered calmly in their little cages, that were hung so thickly on the wall as not to leave an inch of it visible.

"Splendid little morsels, all of them!" exclaimed Monsieur Kerplonne. "Ah, we are going to have a rare beating!"

"So Pippel does not sleep in his shop," said the English gypsy, Oaksmith.

"No. The fellow lives somewhere up one of the avenues," answered Madame Filomel. "He came, the other evening, to consult me about his fortune. I did not tell him," she added with a laugh, "that he was going to have so distinguished a sporting party on his premises."

"Come," said the Wondersmith, producing the box of manikins, "get ready with souls, Madame Filomel. I am impatient to see my little men letting out lives for the first time." Just at the moment that the Wondersmith uttered this sentence, the four gypsies were startled by a hoarse voice issuing from a corner of the room, and propounding in the most guttural tones the intemperate query of "What 'll you take?" This sottish invitation had scarce been given, when a second extremely thick voice replied from an opposite corner, in accents so rough that they seemed to issue from a throat torn and furrowed by the liquid lava of many bar-rooms, "Brandy and water."

"Hollo! who's here?" muttered Herr Hippe, flashing the light of his lantern round the shop.

Oaksmith turned up his coat-cuffs, as if to be ready for a fight; Madame Filomel glided, or rather rolled, towards the door; while Kerplonne put his hand into his pocket, as if to assure himself that his supernumerary optic was all right.

"What 'll you take?" croaked the voice in the corner, once more.

"Brandy and water," rapidly replied the second voice in the other corner. And then, as if by a concerted movement, a series of bibular invitations and acceptances were rolled backwards and forwards with a volubility of utterance that threw Patter *versus* Clatter into the shade.

"What the devil can it be?" muttered the Wondersmith, flashing his lantern here and there. "Ah! it is those Minos."

So saying, he stopped under one of the wicker cages that hung high up on the wall, and raised the lantern above his head, so as to throw the light upon that particular cage. The hospitable individual who had been extending all these hoarse invitations to partake of intoxicating beverages was an inhabitant of the cage. It was a large Mino-bird, who now stood perched on his cross-bar, with his yellowish-orange bill sloped slightly over his shoulder, and his white eye cocked knowingly upon the Wondersmith. The respondent voice in the other corner came from another Mino-bird, who sat in the dusk in a similar cage, also attentively watching the Wondersmith. These Mino-birds have a singular aptitude for acquiring phrases.

"What'll you take!" repeated the Mino, cocking his other eye upon Herr Hippe.

"*Mon Dieu!* what a bird!" exclaimed the little Frenchman. "He is, in truth, polite."

"I don't know what I'll take," said Hippe, as if replying to the Mino-bird; "but I know what you'll

get, old fellow! Filomel, open the cage-doors, and give me the bottle."

Filomel opened, one after another, the doors of the numberless little cages, thereby arousing from slumber their feathered occupants, who opened their beaks, and stretched their claws, and stared with great surprise at the lantern and the midnight visitors.

By this time the Wondersmith had performed the mysterious manipulations with the bottle, and the manikins were once more in full motion, swarming out of their box, sword and dagger in hand, with their little black eyes glittering fiercely, and their white teeth shining. The little creatures seemed to scent their prey. The gypsies stood in the centre of the shop, watching the proceedings eagerly, while the Liliputians made in a body towards the wall and commenced climbing from cage to cage. Then was heard a tremendous fluttering of wings, and faint, despairing "quirks" echoed on all sides. In almost every cage there was a fierce manikin thrusting his sword or dagger vigorously into the body of some unhappy bird. It recalled the antique legend of the battles of the Pygmies and the Cranes. The poor love-birds lay with their emerald feathers dabbled in the heart's blood, shoulder to shoulder in death as in life. Canaries gasped at the bottom of their cages, while the water in their little glass fountains ran red. The bullfinches wore an unnatural crimson on their breasts. The mocking-bird lay on his back, kicking spasmodically, in the last agonies,

with a tiny sword-thrust cleaving his melodious throat in twain, so that from the instrument which used to gush with wondrous music only scarlet drops of blood now trickled. The manikins were ruthless. Their faces were ten times wickeder than ever, as they roamed from cage to cage, slaughtering with a fury that seemed entirely unappeasable. Presently the feathery rustlings became fewer and fainter, and the little pipings of despair died away; and in every cage lay a poor murdered minstrel, with the song that abode within him forever quenched;—in every cage but two, and those two were high up on the wall; and in each glared a pair of wild, white eyes; and an orange beak, tough as steel, pointed threateningly down. With the needles which they grasped as swords all wet and warm with blood, and their beadlike eyes flashing in the light of the lantern, the Liliputian assassins swarmed up the cages in two separate bodies, until they reached the wickets of the habitations in which the Minos abode. Mino saw them coming,—had listened attentively to the many death-struggles of his comrades, and had, in fact, smelt a rat. Accordingly he was ready for the manikins. There he stood at the barbican of his castle, with formidable beak couched like a lance. The manikins made a gallant charge. "What'll you take?" was rattled out by the Mino, in a deep bass, as with one plunge of his sharp bill he scattered the ranks of the enemy, and sent three of them flying to the floor, where they lay with broken limbs. But the manikins were brave automata, and again they

closed and charged the gallant Mino. Again the wicked white eyes of the bird gleamed, and again the orange bill dealt destruction. Everything seemed to be going on swimmingly for Mino, when he found himself attacked in the rear by two treacherous manikins, who had stolen upon him from behind, through the lattice-work of the cage. Quick as lightning the Mino turned to repel this assault, but all too late; two slender, quivering threads of steel crossed in his poor body, and he staggered into a corner of the cage. His white eyes closed, then opened; a shiver passed over his body, beginning at his shoulder-tips and dying off in the extreme tips of the wings; he gasped as if for air, and then, with a convulsive shudder, which ruffled all his feathers, croaked out feebly his little speech. "What'll you take?" Instantly from the opposite corner came the old response still feebler than the question,—a mere gurgle, as it were, of "Brandy and water." Then all was silent. The Mino-birds were dead.

"They spill blood like Christians," said the Wondersmith, gazing fondly on the manikins. "They will be famous assassins."

CHAPTER V

TIED UP

HERR HIPPE stood in the doorway, scowling. His eyes seemed to scorch the poor hunchback, whose form, physically inferior, crouched before that baneful, blazing glance, while its head, mentally brave, reared itself as if to redeem the cowardice of the frame to which it belonged. So the attitude of the serpent: the body pliant, yielding, supple; but the crest thrown aloft, erect, and threatening. As for Zonéla, she was frozen in the attitude of motion;—a dancing nymph in colored marble; agility stunned; elasticity petrified.

Furbelow, astonished at this sudden change, and catching, with all the mysterious rapidity of instinct peculiar to the lower animals, at the enigmatical character of the situation, turned his pleading, melancholy eyes from one to another of the motionless three, as if begging that his humble intellect (pardon me, naturalists, for the use of this word "intellect" in the matter of a monkey!) should be enlightened as speedily as possible. Not receiving the desired information, he, after the manner of trained animals, returned to his muttons; in other words, he conceived that this unusual entrance, and consequent dramatic *tableau,* meant "shop." He therefore dropped Zonéla's hand, and pattered on his velvety

feet over towards the grim figure of the Wondersmith, holding out his poor little paw for the customary copper. He had but one idea drilled into him,—soulless creature that he was,—and that was alms. But I have seen creatures that professed to have souls, and that would have been indignant if you had denied them immortality, who took to the soliciting of alms as naturally as if beggary had been the original sin, and was regularly born with them, and never baptized out of them. I will give these Bandits of the Order of Charity this credit, however, that they knew the best highways and the richest founts of benevolence,—unlike to Furbelow, who, unreasoning and undiscriminating, begged from the first person that was near. Furbelow, owing to this intellectual inferiority to the before-mentioned Alsatians, frequently got more kicks than coppers, and the present supplication which he indulged in towards the Wondersmith was a terrible confirmation of the rule. The reply to the extended pleading paw was what might be called a double-barrelled kick,—a kick to be represented by the power of two when the foot touched the object, multiplied by four when the entire leg formed an angle of 45° with the spinal column. The long, nervous leg of the Wondersmith caught the little creature in the centre of the body, doubled up his brown, hairy form, till he looked like a fur driving-glove, and sent him whizzing across the room into a far corner, where he dropped senseless and flaccid.

This vengeance which Herr Hippe executed upon

Furbelow seemed to have operated as a sort of escape-valve, and he found voice. He hissed out the question, "Who are you?" to the hunchback; and in listening to that essence of sibilation it really seemed as if it proceeded from the serpent that curled upon his upper lip.

"Who are you! Deformed dog, who are you? What do you here?"

"My name is Solon," answered the fearless head of the hunchback, while the frail, cowardly body shivered and trembled inch by inch into a corner.

"So you come to visit my daughter in the night-time, when I am away?" continued the Wondersmith, with a sneering tone that dropped from his snake-wreathed mouth like poison. "You are a brave and gallant lover, are you not? Where did you win that Order of the Curse of God that decorates your shoulders? The women turn their heads and look after you in the street, when you pass, do they not? lost in admiration of that symmetrical figure, those graceful limbs, that neck pliant as the stem that moors the lotus! Elegant, conquering, Christian cripple, what do you here in my daughter's room?"

Can you imagine Jove, limitless in power and wrath, hurling from his vast grasp mountain after mountain upon the struggling Enceladus,—and picture the Titan sinking, sinking deeper and deeper into the earth, crushed and dying, with nothing visible through the superincumbent masses of Pelion and Ossa but a gigantic head and two flaming eyes,

that, despite the death which is creeping through each vein, still flash back defiance to the divine enemy? Well, Solon and Herr Hippe presented such a picture, seen through the wrong end of a telescope,—reduced in proportion, but alike in action. Solon's feeble body seemed to sink into utter annihilation beneath the horrible taunts that his enemy hurled at him, while the large, brave brow and unconquered eyes still sent forth a magnetic resistance.

Suddenly the poor hunchback felt his arm grasped. A thrill seemed to run through his entire body. A warm atmosphere, invigorating and full of delicious odor, surrounded him. It appeared as if invisible bandages were twisted all about his limbs, giving him a strange strength. His sinking legs straightened. His powerless arms were braced. Astonished, he glanced round for an instant, and beheld Zonéla, with a world of love burning in her large lambent eyes, wreathing her round white arms about his humped shoulders. Then the poet knew the great sustaining power of love. Solon reared himself boldly.

"Sneer at my poor form," he cried, in strong vibrating tones, flinging out one long arm and one thin finger at the Wondersmith, as if he would have impaled him like a beetle. "Humiliate me if you can. I care not. You are a wretch, and I am honest and pure. This girl is not your daughter. You are like one of those demons in the fairy tales that held beauty and purity locked in infernal spells.

I do not fear you, Herr Hippe. There are stories abroad about you in the neighborhood, and when you pass people say that they feel evil and blight covering over their threshold. You persecute this girl. You are her tyrant. You hate her. I am a cripple. Providence has cast this lump upon my shoulders. But that is nothing. The camel, that is the salvation of the children of the desert, has been given his hump in order that he might bear his human burden better. This girl, who is homeless as the Arab, is my appointed load in life, and, please God, I will carry her on this back, hunched though it may be. I have come to see her because I love her,—because she loves me. You have no claim on her; so I will take her from you."

Quick as lightning the Wondersmith had stridden a few paces, and grasped the poor cripple, who was yet quivering with the departing thunder of his passion. He seized him in his bony, muscular grasp, as he would have seized a puppet, and held him at arm's length, gasping and powerless; while Zonéla pale, breathless, entreating, sank half-kneeling on the floor.

"Your skeleton will be interesting to science when you are dead, Mr. Solon," hissed the Wondersmith. "But before I have the pleasure of reducing you to an anatomy, which I will assuredly do, I wish to compliment you on your power of penetration, or sources of information; for I know not if you have derived your knowledge from your own mental research or the efforts of others. You are perfectly

correct in your statement that this charming young person, who day after day parades the streets with a barrel-organ and a monkey,—the last unhappily indisposed at present,—listening to the degrading jokes of ribald boys and depraved men,—you are quite correct, sir, in stating that she is not my daughter. On the contrary, she is the daughter of an Hungarian nobleman who had the misfortune to incur my displeasure. I had a son, crooked spawn of a Christian!—a son, not like you, cankered, gnarled stump of life that you are,—but a youth tall and fair and noble in aspect, as became a child of one whose lineage makes Pharaoh modern,—a youth whose foot in the dance was as swift and beautiful to look at as the golden sandals of the sun when he dances upon the sea in summer. This youth was virtuous and good; and being a good race, and dwelling in a country where his rank, gypsy as he was, was recognized, he mixed with the proudest of the land. One day he fell in with this accursed Hungarian, a fierce drinker of that devil's blood called brandy. My child until that hour had avoided this bane of our race. Generous wine he drank, because the soul of the sun, our ancestor, palpitated in its purple waves. But brandy, which is fallen and accursed wine, as devils are fallen ad accursed angels, had never crossed his lips, until in an evil hour he was seduced by this Christian hog, and from that day forth his life was one fiery debauch, which set only in the black waves of death. I vowed vengeance on the destroyer of my child, and I kept

my word. I have destroyed *his* child,—not compassed her death, but blighted her life, steeped her in misery and poverty, and now, thanks to the thousand devils, I have discovered a new torture for her heart. She thought to solace her life with a love-episode! Sweet little epicure that she was! She shall have her little crooked lover, sha'n't she? O, yes! she shall have him, cold and stark and livid, with that great, black, heavy hunch, which no back, however broad, can bear, Death, sitting between his shoulders!"

There was something so awful and demoniac in this entire speech and the manner in which it was delivered, that it petrified Zonéla into a mere inanimate figure, whose eyes seemed unalterably fixed on the fierce, cruel face of the Wondersmith. As for Solon, he was paralyzed in the grasp of his foe. He heard, but could not reply. His large eyes, dilated with horror to far beyond their ordinary size, expressed unutterably agony.

The last sentence had hardly been hissed out by the gypsy when he took from his pocket a long, thin coil of whip-cord, which he entangled in a complicated mesh around the cripple's body. It was not the ordinary binding of a prisoner. The slender lash passed and repassed in a thousand intricate folds over the powerless limbs of the poor hunchback. When the operation was completed, he looked as if he had been sewed from head to foot in some singularly ingenious species of network.

"Now, my pretty lop-sided little lover," laughed

Herr Hippe, flinging Solon over his shoulder as a fisherman might fling a netful of fish, "we will proceed to put you into your little cage until your little coffin is quite ready. Meanwhile we will lock up your darling beggar-girl to mourn over your untimely end."

So saying, he stepped from the room with his captive, and securely locked the door behind him.

When he had disappeared, the frozen Zonéla thawed, and with a shriek of anguish flung herself on the inanimate body of Furbelow.

CHAPTER VI

THE POISONING OF THE SWORDS

It was New Year's eve, and eleven o'clock at night. All over this great land, and in every great city in the land, curly heads were lying on white pillows, dreaming of the coming of the generous Santa Claus. Innumerable stockings hung by countless bedsides. Visions of beautiful toys, passing in splendid pageantry through myriads of dimly lit dormitories, made millions of little hearts palpitate in sleep. Ah! what heavenly toys those were that the children of this soil beheld, that mystic night, in their dreams! Painted cars with orchestral wheels, making music more delicious than the roll of planets. Agile men, of cylindrical figure, who sprang unexpectedly out of meek-looking boxes, with a supernatural fierceness in their crimson cheeks and fur-whiskers. Herds of marvellous sheep, with fleeces as impossible as the one that Jason sailed after; animals entirely indifferent to grass and water and "rot" and "ticks." Horses spotted with an astounding regularity, and furnished with the most ingenious methods of locomotion. Slender foreigners, attired in painfully short tunics, whose existence passed in continually turning heels over head down a steep flight of steps, at the bottom of which they lay in an exhausted condition with dislocated

limbs, until they were restored to their former elevation, when they went at it again as if nothing had happened. Stately swans, that seemed to have a touch of the ostrich in them; for they swam continually after a piece of iron which was held before them, as if consumed with a ferruginous hunger. Whole farmyards of roosters, whose tails curled the wrong way,—a slight defect, that was, however, amply atoned for by the size and brilliancy of their scarlet combs, which, it would appear, Providence had intended for pen-wipers. Pears, that, when applied to youthful lips, gave forth sweet and inspiring sounds. Regiments of soldiers, that performed neat but limited evolutions on cross-jointed contractile battle-fields. All these things, idealized, transfigured, and illuminated by the powers and atmosphere and colored lamps of dream-land, did the millions of dear sleeping children behold, the night of the New Year's eve of which I speak.

It was on this night, when Time was preparing to shed his skin, and come out young and golden and glossy as ever,—when, in the vast chambers of the universe, silent and infallible preparations were making for the wonderful birth of the coming year, —when mystic dews were secreted for his baptism, and mystic instruments were tuned in space to welcome him,—it was at this holy and solemn hour that the Wondersmith and his three gypsy companions sat in close conclave in the little parlor before mentioned.

There was a fire roaring in the grate. On a table,

nearly in the centre of the room, stood a huge decanter of port wine, that glowed in the blaze which lit the chamber like a flask of crimson fire. On every side, piled in heaps, inanimate, but scowling with the same old wondrous scowl, lay myriads of the manikins, all clutching in their wooden hands their tiny weapons. The Wondersmith held in one hand a small silver bowl filled with a green, glutinous substance, which he was delicately applying, with the aid of a camel's-hair brush, to the tips of tiny swords and daggers. A horrible smile wandered over his sallow face,—a smile as unwholesome in appearance as the sickly light that plays above reeking graveyards.

"Let us drink great draughts, brothers," he cried, leaving off his strange anointment for a while, to lift a great glass, filled with sparkling liquor, to his lips. "Let us drink to our approaching triumph. Let us drink to the great poison, Macousha. Subtle seed of Death,—swift hurricane that sweeps away Life,—vast hammer that crushes brain and heart and artery with its resistless weight,—I drink to it."

"It is a noble decoction, Duke Balthazar," said the old fortune-teller and midwife, Madame Filomel, nodding in her chair as she swallowed her wine in great gulps. "Where did you obtain it?"

"It is made," said the Wondersmith, swallowing another great draught of wine ere he replied, "in the wild woods of Guiana, in silence and in mystery. But one tribe of Indians, the Macoushi Indians, know the secret. It is simmered over fires built of

strange woods, and the maker of it dies in the making. The place, for a mile around the spot where it is fabricated, is shunned as accursed. Devils hover over the pot in which it stews; and the birds of the air, scenting the smallest breath of its vapor from far away, drop to earth with paralyzed wings, cold and dead."

"It kills, then, fast?" asked Kerplonne, the artificial-eye maker,—his own eyes gleaming, under the influence of the wine, with a sinister lustre, as if they had been fresh from the factory, and were yet untarnished by use.

"Kills?" echoed the Wondersmith, derisively; "it is swifter than thunderbolts, stronger than lightning. But you shall see it proved before we let forth our army on the city accursed. You shall see a wretch die, as if smitten by a falling fragment of the sun."

"What? Do you mean Solon?" asked Oaksmith and the fortune-teller together.

"Ah, you mean the young man who makes the commerce with books?" echoed Kerplonne. "It is well. His agonies will instruct us."

"Yes! Solon," answered Hippe, with a savage accent. "I hate him, and he shall die this horrid death. Ah! how the little fellows will leap upon him, when I bring him in, bound and helpless, and give their beautiful wicked souls to them! How they will pierce him in ten thousand spots with their poisoned weapons, until his skin turns blue and violet and crimson, and his form

swells with the venom,—until his hump is lost in shapeless flesh! He hears what I say, every word of it. He is in the closet next door, and is listening. How comfortable he feels! How the sweat of terror rolls on his brow! How he tries to loosen his bonds, and curses all earth and heaven when he finds that he cannot! Ho! ho! Handsome lover of Zonéla, will she kiss you when you are livid and swollen? Brothers, let us drink again,—drink always. Here, Oaksmith, take these brushes,—and you, Filomel,—and finish the anointing of these swords. This wine is grand. This poison is grand. It is fine to have good wine to drink, and good poison to kill with; is it not?"—and, with flushed face and rolling eyes, the Wondersmith continued to drink and use his brush alternately.

The others hastened to follow his example. It was a horrible scene: those four wicked faces; those myriads of tiny faces, just as wicked; the certain unearthly air that pervaded the apartment; the red, unwholesome glare cast by the fire; the wild and reckless way in which the weird company drank the red-illumined wine.

The anointing of the swords went on rapidly, and the wine went as rapidly down the throats of the four poisoners. Their faces grew more and more inflamed each instant; their eyes shone like rolling fireballs; their hair was moist and dishevelled. The old fortune-teller rocked to and fro in her chair, like those legless plaster figures that sway upon con-

vex loaded bottoms. All four began to mutter incoherent sentences, and babble unintelligible wickedness. Still the anointing of the swords went on.

"I see the faces of millions of young corpses," babbled Herr Hippe, gazing, with swimming eyes, into the silver bowl that contained the Macousha poison,—"all young, all Christians,—and the little fellows dancing, dancing, and stabbing, stabbing. Filomel, Filomel, I say!"

"Well, Grand Duke," snored the old woman, giving a violent lurch.

"Where's the bottle of souls?"

"In my right-hand pocket, Herr Hippe";—and she felt, so as to assure herself that it was there. She half drew out the black bottle, before described in this narrative, and let it slide again into her pocket,—let it slide again, but it did not completely regain its former place. Caught by some accident, it hung half out, swaying over the edge of the pocket, as the fat midwife rolled backwards and forwards in her drunken efforts at equilibrium.

"All right," said Herr Hippe, "perfectly right! Let's drink."

He reached out his hand for his glass, and, with a dull sigh, dropped on the table, in the instantaneous slumber of intoxication. Oaksmith soon fell back in his chair, breathing heavily. Kerplonne followed. And the heavy, stertorous breathing of Filomel told that she slumbered also; but still her chair retained its rocking motion, and still the bottle of souls balanced itself on the edge of her pocket.

CHAPTER VII

LET LOOSE

SURE enough, Solon heard every word of the fiendish talk of the Wondersmith. For how many days he had been shut up, bound in the terrible net, in that dark closet, he did not know; but now he felt that his last hour was come. His little strength was completely worn out in efforts to disentangle himself. Once a day a door opened, and Herr Hippe placed a crust of bread and a cup of water within his reach. On this meagre fare he had subsisted. It was a hard life; but, bad as it was, it was better than the horrible death that menaced him. His brain reeled with terror at the prospect of it. Then, where was Zonéla? Why did she not come to his rescue? But she was, perhaps, dead. The darkness, too, appalled him. A faint light, when the moon was bright, came at night through a chink far up in the wall; and the only other hole in the chamber was an aperture through which, at some former time, a stove-pipe had been passed. Even if he were free, there would have been small hope of escape; but, laced as it were in a network of steel, what was to be done? He groaned and writhed upon the floor, and tore at the boards with his hands, which were free from the wrists down. All else was as solidly laced up as an Indian papoose. Nothing but pride kept him from shrieking aloud,

when, on the night of New Year's eve, he heard the fiendish Hippe recite the programme of his murder.

While he was thus wailing and gnashing his teeth in darkness and torture, he heard a faint noise above his head. Then something seemed to leap from the ceiling and alight softly on the floor. He shuddered with terror. Was it some new torture of the Wondersmith's invention? The next moment, he felt some small animal crawling over his body, and a soft, silky paw was pushed timidly across his face. His heart leaped with joy.

"It is Furbelow!" he cried. "Zonéla has sent him. He came through the stove-pipe hole."

It was Furbelow, indeed, restored to life by Zonéla's care, and who had come down a narrow tube, that no human being could have threaded, to console the poor captive. The monkey nestled closely into the hunchback's bosom, and, as he did so, Solon felt something cold and hard hanging from his neck. He touched it. It was sharp. By the dim light that struggled through the aperture high up in the wall, he discovered a knife, suspended by a bit of cord. Ah! how the blood came rushing through the veins that crossed over and through his heart, when life and liberty came to him in this bit of rusty steel! With his manacled hands he loosened the heaven-sent weapon; a few cuts were rapidly made in the cunning network of cord that enveloped his limbs, and in a few seconds he was free!—cramped and faint with hunger, but free!—free to move, to use the limbs that God had given him for

his preservation,—free to fight,—to die fighting, perhaps,—but still to die free. He ran to the door. The bolt was a weak one, for the Wondersmith had calculated more surely on his prison of cords than any jail of stone,—and more; and with a few efforts the door opened. He went cautiously out into the darkness, with Furbelow perched on his shoulder, pressing his cold muzzle against his cheek. He had made but a few steps when a trembling hand was put into his, and in another moment Zonéla's palpitating heart was pressed against his own. One long kiss, an embrace, a few whispered words, and the hunchback and the girl stole softly towards the door of the chamber in which the four gypsies slept. All seemed still; nothing but the hard breathing of the sleepers and the monotonous rocking of Madame Filomel's chair broke the silence. Solon stooped down and put his eye to the keyhole, through which a red bar of light streamed into the entry. As he did so, his foot crushed some brittle substance that lay just outside the door; at the same moment a howl of agony was heard to issue from the room within. Solon started; nor did he know that at that instánt he had crushed into dust Monsieur Kerplonne's supernumerary eye, and the owner, though wrapt in a drunken sleep, felt the pang quiver through his brain.

While Solon peeped through the keyhole, all in the room was motionless. He had not gazed, however, for many seconds, when the chair of the fortune-teller gave a sudden lurch, and the black bottle,

already hanging half out of her wide pocket, slipped entirely from its resting-place, and, falling heavily to the ground, shivered into fragments.

Then took place an astonishing spectacle. The myriads of armed dolls, that lay in piles about the room, became suddenly imbued with motion. They stood up straight, their tiny limbs moved, their black eyes flashed with wicked purposes, their thread-like swords gleamed as they waved them to and fro. The villanous souls imprisoned in the bottle began to work within them. Like the Liliputians, when they found the giant Gulliver asleep, they scaled in swarms the burly sides of the four sleeping gypsies. At every step they took, they drove their thin swords and quivering daggers into the flesh of the drunken authors of their being. To stab and kill was their mission, and they stabbed and killed with incredible fury. They clustered on the Wondersmith's sallow cheeks and sinewy throat, piercing every portion with their diminutive poisoned blades. Filomel's fat carcass was alive with them. They blackened the spare body of Monsieur Kerplonne. They covered Oaksmith's huge form like a cluster of insects.

Overcome completely with the fumes of wine, these tiny wounds did not for a few moments awaken the sleeping victims. But the swift and deadly poison Macousha, with which the weapons had been so fiendishly anointed, began to work. Herr Hippe, stung into sudden life, leaped to his feet, with a dwarf army clinging to his clothes and his hands,—always stabbing, stabbing, stabbing. For an instant,

a look of stupid bewilderment clouded his face; then the horrible truth burst upon him. He gave a shriek like that which a horse utters when he finds himself fettered and surrounded by fire,—a shriek that curdled the air for miles and miles.

"Oaksmith! Kerplonne! Filomel! Awake! awake! We are lost! The souls have got loose! We are dead! poisoned! O accursed ones! O demons, ye are slaying me! Ah! fiends of hell!"

Aroused by these frightful howls, the three gypsies sprang also to their feet, to find themselves stung to death by the manikins. They raved, they shrieked, they swore. They staggered round the chamber. Blinded in the eyes by the ever-stabbing weapons,—with the poison already burning in their veins like red-hot lead,—their forms swelling and discoloring visibly every moment,—their howls and attitudes and furious gestures made the scene look like a chamber in hell.

Maddened beyond endurance, the Wondersmith, half-blind and choking with the venom that had congested all the blood-vessels of his body, seized dozens of the manikins and dashed them into the fire, trampling them down with his feet.

"Ye shall die too, if I die," he cried, with a roar like that of a tiger. "Ye shall burn, if I burn. I gave ye life,—I give ye death. Down!—down!—burn! flame! Fiends that ye are, to slay us! Help me, brothers! Before we die, let us have our revenge!"

On this, the other gypsies, themselves maddened by approaching death, began hurling manikins, by

handfuls, into the fire. The little creatures, being wooden of body, quickly caught the flames, and an awful struggle for life took place in miniature in the grate. Some of them escaped from between the bars and ran about the room, blazing, writhing in agony, and igniting the curtains and other draperies that hung around. Others fought and stabbed one another in the very core of the fire, like combating salamanders. Meantime, the motions of the gypsies grew more languid and slow, and their curses were uttered in choked guttural tones. The faces of all four were spotted with red and green and violet, like so many egg-plants. Their bodies were swollen to a frightful size, and at last they dropped on the floor, like over-ripe fruit shaken from the boughs by the winds of autumn.

The chamber was now a sheet of fire. The flames roared round and round, as if seeking for escape, licking every projecting cornice and sill with greedy tongues, as the serpent licks his prey before he swallows it. A hot, putrid breath came through the keyhole, and smote Solon and Zonéla like a wind of death. They clasped each other's hands with a moan of terror, and fled from the house.

The next morning, when the young year was just unclosing its eyes, and the happy children all over the great city were peeping from their beds into the myriads of stockings hanging near by, the blue skies of heaven shone through a black network of stone and charred rafters. These were all that remained of the habitation of Herre Hippe, the Wondersmith.

THE LOST ROOM

It was oppressively warm. The sun had long disappeared, but seemed to have left its vital spirit of heat behind it. The air rested; the leaves of the acacia-trees that shrouded my windows hung plumb-like on their delicate stalks. The smoke of my cigar scarce rose above my head, but hung about me in a pale blue cloud, which I had to dissipate with languid waves of my hand. My shirt was open at the throat, and my chest heaved laboriously in the effort to catch some breaths of fresher air. The noises of the city seemed to be wrapped in slumber, and the shrilling of the mosquitoes was the only sound that broke the stillness.

As I lay with my feet elevated on the back of a chair, wrapped in that peculiar frame of mind in which thought assumes a species of lifeless motion, the strange fancy seized me of making a languid inventory of the principal articles of furniture in my room. It was a task well suited to the mood in which I found myself. Their forms were duskily defined in the dim twilight that floated shadowily through the chamber; it was no labor to note and particularize each, and from the place where I sat I could command a view of all my possessions without even turning my head.

There was, *imprimis,* that ghostly lithograph by

Calame. It was a mere black spot on the white wall, but my inner vision scrutinized every detail of the picture. A wild, desolate, midnight heath, with a spectral oak-tree in the centre of the foreground. The wind blows fiercely, and the jagged branches, clothed scantily with ill-grown leaves, are swept to the left continually by its giant force. A formless wrack of clouds streams across the awful sky, and the rain sweeps almost parallel with the horizon. Beyond, the heath stretches off into endless blackness, in the extreme of which either fancy or art has conjured up some undefinable shapes that seem riding into space. At the base of the huge oak stands a shrouded figure. His mantle is wound by the blast in tight folds around his form, and the long cock's feather in his hat is blown upright, till it seems as if it stood on end with fear. His features are not visible, for he has grasped his cloak with both hands, and drawn it from either side across his face. The picture is seemingly objectless. It tells no tale, but there is a weird power about it that haunts one, and it was for that I bought it.

Next to the picture comes the round blot that hangs below it, which I know to be a smoking-cap. It has my coat of arms embroidered on the front, and for that reason I never wear it; though, when properly arranged on my head, with its long blue silken tassel hanging down by my cheek, I believe it becomes me well. I remember the time when it was in the course of manufacture. I remember the tiny little hands that pushed the colored silks so nimbly

through the cloth that was stretched on the embroidery-frame,—the vast trouble I was put to to get a colored copy of my armorial bearings for the heraldic work which was to decorate the front of the band,—the pursings up of the little mouth, and the contractions of the young forehead, as their possessor plunged into a profound sea of cogitation touching the way in which the cloud should be represented from which the armed hand, that is my crest, issues,—the heavenly moment when the tiny hands placed it on my head, in a position that I could not bear for more than a few seconds, and I, king-like, immediately assumed my royal prerogative after the coronation, and instantly levied a tax on my only subject, which was, however, not paid unwillingly. Ah, the cap is there, but the embroiderer has fled; for Atropos was severing the web of life above her head while she was weaving that silken shelter for mine!

How uncouthly the huge piano that occupies the corner at the left of the door looms out in the uncertain twilight! I neither play nor sing, yet I own a piano. It is a comfort to me to look at it, and to feel that the music is there, although I am not able to break the spell that binds it. It is pleasant to know that Bellini and Mozart, Cimarosa, Porpora, Glück, and all such,—or at least their souls,—sleep in that unwieldy case. There lie embalmed, as it were, all operas, sonatas, oratorios, notturnos, marches, songs, and dances, that ever climbed into existence through the four bars that wall in melody.

Once I was entirely repaid for the investment of my funds in that instrument which I never use. Blokeeta, the composer, came to see me. Of course his instincts urged him as irresistibly to my piano as if some magnetic power lay within it compelling him to approach. He tuned it, he played on it. All night long, until the gray and spectral dawn rose out of the depths of the midnight, he sat and played, and I lay smoking by the window listening. Wild, unearthly, and sometimes insufferably painful, were the improvisations of Blokeeta. The chords of the instrument seemed breaking with anguish. Lost souls shrieked in his dismal preludes; the half-heard utterances of spirits in pain, that groped at inconceivable distances from anything lovely or harmonious, seemed to rise dimly up out of the waves of sound that gathered under his hands. Melancholy human love wandered out on distant heaths, or beneath dank and gloomy cypresses, murmuring its unanswered sorrow, or hateful gnomes sported and sang in the stagnant swamps, triumphing in unearthly tones over the knight whom they had lured to his death. Such was Blokeeta's night's entertainment; and when he at length closed the piano, and hurried away through the cold morning, he left a memory about the instrument from which I could never escape.

Those snow-shoes that hang in the space between the mirror and the door recall Canadian wanderings,—a long race through the dense forests, over the frozen snow, through whose brittle crust the

slender hoofs of the caribou that we were pursuing sank at every step, until the poor creature despairingly turned at bay in a small juniper coppice, and we heartlessly shot him down. And I remember how Gabriel, the *habitant,* and François, the half-breed, cut his throat, and how the hot blood rushed out in a torrent over the snowy soil; and I recall the snow *cabane* that Gabriel built, where we all three slept so warmly; and the great fire that glowed at our feet, painting all kinds of demoniac shapes on the black screen of forest that lay without; and the deer-steaks that we roasted for our breakfast; and the savage drunkenness of Gabriel in the morning, he having been privately drinking out of my brandy-flask all the night long.

That long, haftless dagger that dangles over the mantelpiece makes my heart swell. I found it, when a boy, in a hoary old castle in which one of my maternal ancestors once lived. That same ancestor—who, by the way, yet lives in history—was a strange old sea-king, who dwelt on the extremist point of the southwestern coast of Ireland. He owned the whole of that fertile island called Inniskeiran, which directly faces Cape Clear, where between them the Atlantic rolls furiously, forming what the fishermen of the place call "the Sound." An awful place in winter is that same Sound. On certain days no boat can live there for a moment, and Cape Clear is frequently cut off for days from any communication with the main land.

This old sea-king—Sir Florence O'Driscoll by

name—passed a stormy life. From the summit of his castle he watched the ocean, and when any richly laden vessels, bound from the south to the industrious Galway merchants, hove in sight, Sir Florence hoisted the sails of his galley, and it went hard with him if he did not tow into harbor ship and crew. In this way he lived; not a very honest mode of livelihood, certainly, according to our modern ideas, but quite reconcilable with the morals of the time. As may be supposed, Sir Florence got into trouble. Complaints were laid against him at the English court by the plundered merchants, and the Irish viking set out for London, to plead his own cause before good Queen Bess, as she was called. He had one powerful recommendation: he was a marvellously handsome man. Not Celtic by descent, but half Spanish, half Danish in blood, he had the great northern stature with the regular features, flashing eyes, and dark hair of the Iberian race. This may account for the fact that his stay at the English court was much longer than was necessary, as also for the tradition, which a local historian mentions, that the English Queen evinced a preference for the Irish chieftain, of other nature than that usually shown by monarch to subject.

Previous to his departure, Sir Florence had intrusted the care of his property to an Englishman named Hull. During the long absence of the knight, this person managed to ingratiate himself with the local authorities, and gain their favor so far that they were willing to support him in almost any

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scheme. After a protracted stay, Sir Florence, pardoned of all his misdeeds, returned to his home. Home no longer. Hull was in possession, and refused to yield an acre of the lands he had so nefariously acquired. It was no use appealing to the law, for its officers were in the opposite interest. It was no use appealing to the Queen, for she had another lover, and had forgotten the poor Irish knight by this time; and so the viking passed the best portion of his life in unsuccessful attempts to reclaim his vast estates, and was eventually, in his old age, obliged to content himself with his castle by the sea and the island of Inniskeiran, the only spot of which the usurper was unable to deprive him. So this old story of my kinsman's fate looms up out of the darkness that enshrouds that haftless dagger hanging on the wall.

It was somewhat after the foregoing fashion that I dreamily made the inventory of my personal property. As I turned my eyes on each object, one after the other,—or the places where they lay, for the room was now so dark that it was almost impossible to see with any distinctness,—a crowd of memories connected with each rose up before me, and, perforce, I had to indulge them. So I proceeded but slowly, and at last my cigar shortened to a hot and bitter morsel that I could barely hold between my lips, while it seemed to me that the night grew each moment more insufferably oppressive. While I was revolving some impossible means of cooling my wretched body, the cigar stump began to burn my

lips. I flung it angrily through the open window, and stooped out to watch it falling. It first lighted on the leaves of the acacia, sending out a spray of red sparkles, then, rolling off, it fell plump on the dark walk in the garden, faintly illuminating for a moment the dusky trees and breathless flowers. Whether it was the contrast between the red flash of the cigar-stump and the silent darkness of the garden, or whether it was that I detected by the sudden light a faint waving of the leaves, I know not; but something suggested to me that the garden was cool. I will take a turn there, thought I, just as I am; it cannot be warmer than this room, and however still the atmosphere, there is always a feeling of liberty and spaciousness in the open air, that partially supplies one's wants. With this idea running through my head, I arose, lit another cigar, and passed out into the long, intricate corridors that led to the main staircase. As I crossed the threshold of my room, with what a different feeling I should have passed it had I known that I was never to set foot in it again!

I lived in a very large house, in which I occupied two rooms on the second floor. The house was old-fashioned, and all the floors communicated by a huge circular staircase that wound up through the centre of the building, while at every landing long, rambling corridors stretched off into mysterious nooks and corners. This palace of mine was very high, and its resources, in the way of crannies and windings, seemed to be interminable. Nothing seemed to stop

anywhere. Cul-de-sacs were unknown on the premises. The corridors and passages, like mathematical lines, seemed capable of indefinite extensions, and the object of the architect must have been to erect an edifice in which people might go ahead forever. The whole place was gloomy, not so much because it was large, but because an unearthly nakedness seemed to pervade the structure. The staircases, corridors, halls, and vestibules all partook of a desert-like desolation. There was nothing on the walls to break the sombre monotony of those long vistas of shade. No carvings on the wainscoting, no moulded masks peering down from the simply severe cornices, no marble vases on the landings. There was an eminent dreariness and want of life—so rare in an American establishment—all over the abode. It was Hood's haunted house put in order and newly painted. The servants, too, were shadowy, and chary of their visits. Bells rang three times before the gloomy chambermaid could be induced to present herself; and the negro waiter, a ghoul-like looking creature from Congo, obeyed the summons only when one's patience was exhausted or one's want satisfied in some other way. When he did come, one felt sorry that he had not stayed away altogether, so sullen and savage did he appear. He moved along the echoless floors with a slow, noiseless shamble, until his dusky figure, advancing from the gloom, seemed like some reluctant afreet, compelled by the superior power of his master to disclose himself. When the doors of all the chambers were

closed, and no light illuminated the long corridor save the red, unwholesome glare of a small oil lamp on a table at the end, where late lodgers lit their candles, one could not by any possibility conjure up a sadder or more desolate prospect.

Yet the house suited me. Of meditative and sedentary habits, I enjoyed the extreme quiet. There were but few lodgers, from which I infer that the landlord did not drive a very thriving trade; and these, probably oppressed by the sombre spirit of the place, were quiet and ghost-like in their movements. The proprietor I scarcely ever saw. My bills were deposited by unseen hands every month on my table, while I was out walking or riding, and my pecuniary response was intrusted to the attendant afreet. On the whole, when the bustling wideawake spirit of New York is taken into consideration, the sombre, half-vivified character of the house in which I lived was an anomaly that no one appreciated better than I who lived there.

I felt my way down the wide, dark staircase in my pursuit of zephyrs. The garden, as I entered it, did feel somewhat cooler than my own room, and I puffed my cigar along the dim, cypress-shrouded walks with a sensation of comparative relief. It was very dark. The tall-growing flowers that bordered the path were so wrapped in gloom as to present the aspect of solid pyramidal masses, all the details of leaves and blossoms being buried in an embracing darkness, while the trees had lost all form, and seemed like masses of overhanging cloud. It was a

place and time to excite the imagination; for in the impenetrable cavities of endless gloom there was room for the most riotous fancies to play at will. I walked and walked, and the echoes of my footsteps on the ungravelled and mossy path suggested a double feeling. I felt alone and yet in company at the same time. The solitariness of the place made itself distinct enough in the stillness, broken alone by the hollow reverberations of my step, while those very reverberations seemed to imbue me with an undefined feeling that I was not alone. I was not, therefore, much startled when I was suddenly accosted from beneath the solid darkness of an immense cypress by a voice saying, "Will you give me a light, sir?"

"Certainly," I replied, trying in vain to distinguish the speaker amidst the impenetrable dark.

Somebody advanced, and I held out my cigar. All I could gather definitely about the individual who thus accosted me was that he must have been of extremely small stature; for I, who am by no means an overgrown man, had to stoop considerably in handing him my cigar. The vigorous puff that he gave his own lighted up my Havana for a moment, and I fancied that I caught a glimpse of a pale, weird countenance, immersed in a background of long, wild hair. The flash was, however, so momentary that I could not even say certainly whether this was an actual impression or the mere effort of imagination to embody that which the senses had failed to distinguish.

"Sir, you are out late," said this unknown to me, as he, with half-uttered thanks, handed me back my cigar, for which I had to grope in the gloom.

"Not later than usual," I replied, dryly.

"Hum! you are fond of late wanderings, then?"

"That is just as the fancy seizes me."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Queer house, isn't it?"

"I have only found it quiet."

"Hum! But you *will* find it queer, take my word for it." This was earnestly uttered; and I felt at the same time a bony finger laid on my arm, that cut it sharply like a blunted knife.

"I cannot take your word for any such assertion," I replied, rudely, shaking off the bony finger with an irrepressible motion of disgust.

"No offence, no offence," muttered my unseen companion rapidly, in a strange, subdued voice, that would have been shrill had it been louder; "your being angry does not alter the matter. You will find it a queer house. Everybody finds it a queer house. Do you know who live there?"

"I never busy myself, sir, about other people's affairs," I answered sharply, for the individual's manner, combined with my utter uncertainty as to his appearance, oppressed me with an irksome longing to be rid of him.

"O, you don't? Well, I do. I know what they are,—well, well, well!" and as he pronounced the three last words his voice rose with each, until, with

the last, it reached a shrill shriek that echoed horribly among the lonely walks. "Do you know what they eat?" he continued.

"No, sir,—nor care."

"O, but you will care. You must care. You shall care. I'll tell you what they are. They are enchanters. They are ghouls. They are cannibals. Did you never remark their eyes, and how they gloated on you when you passed? Did you never remark the food that they served up at your table? Did you never in the dead of night hear muffled and unearthly footsteps gliding along the corridors, and stealthy hands turning the handle of your door? Does not some magnetic influence fold itself continually around you when they pass, and send a thrill through spirit and body, and a cold shiver that no sunshine will chase away? O, you have! You have felt all these things! I know it!"

The earnest rapidity, the subdued tones, the eagerness of accent, with which all this was uttered, impressed me most uncomfortably. It really seemed as if I could recall all those weird occurrences and influences of which he spoke; and I shuddered in spite of myself in the midst of the impenetrable darkness that surrounded me.

"Hum!" said I, assuming, without knowing it, a confidential tone, "may I ask how you know these things?"

"How I know them? Because I am their enemy; because they tremble at my whisper; because I hang upon their track with the perseverance of a blood-

hound and the stealthiness of a tiger; because—because—I was *of* them once!"

"Wretch!" I cried excitedly, for involuntarily his eager tones had wrought me up to a high pitch of spasmodic nervousness, "then you mean to say that you—"

As I uttered this word, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I stretched forth my hand in the direction of the speaker and made a blind clutch. The tips of my fingers seemed to touch a surface as smooth as glass, that glided suddenly from under them. A sharp, angry hiss sounded through the gloom, followed by a whirring noise, as if some projectile passed rapidly by, and the next moment I felt instinctively that I was alone.

A most disagreeable feeling instantly assailed me; —a prophetic instinct that some terrible misfortune menaced me; an eager and overpowering anxiety to get back to my own room without loss of time. I turned and ran blindly along the dark cypress alley, every dusky clump of flowers that rose blackly in the borders making my heart each moment cease to beat. The echoes of my own footsteps seemed to redouble and assume the sounds of unknown pursuers following fast upon my track. The boughs of lilac-bushes and syringas, that here and there stretched partly across the walk, seemed to have been furnished suddenly with hooked hands that sought to grasp me as I flew by, and each moment I expected to behold some awful and impassable barrier fall across my track and wall me up forever.

At length I reached the wide entrance. With a single leap I sprang up the four or five steps that formed the stoop, and dashed along the hall, up the wide, echoing stairs, and again along the dim, funereal corridors until I paused, breathless and panting, at the door of my room. Once so far, I stopped for an instant and leaned heavily against one of the panels, panting lustily after my late run. I had, however, scarcely rested my whole weight against the door, when it suddenly gave way, and I staggered in head-foremost. To my utter astonishment the room I had left in profound darkness was now a blaze of light. So intense was the illumination that, for a few seconds while the pupils of my eyes were contracting under the sudden change, I saw absolutely nothing save the dazzling glare. This fact in itself, coming on me with such utter suddenness, was sufficient to prolong my confusion, and it was not until after several minutes had elapsed that I perceived the room was not only illuminated, but occupied. And such occupants! Amazement at the scene took such possession of me that I was incapable of either moving or uttering a word. All that I could do was to lean against the wall, and stare blankly at the strange picture.

It might have been a scene out of Faublas, or Grammont's Memoirs, or happened in some palace of Minister Fouque.

Round a large table in the centre of the room, where I had left a student-like litter of books and papers, were seated a half a dozen persons. Three

were men and three were women. The table was heaped with a prodigality of luxuries. Luscious eastern fruits were piled up in silver filigree vases, through whose meshes their glowing rinds shone in the contrasts of a thousand hues. Small silver dishes that Benvenuto might have designed, filled with succulent and aromatic meats, were distributed upon a cloth of snowy damask. Bottles of every shape, slender ones from the Rhine, stout fellows from Holland, sturdy ones from Spain, and quaint basket-woven flasks from Italy, absolutely littered the board. Drinking-glasses of every size and hue filled up the interstices, and the thirsty German flagon stood side by side with the aerial bubbles of Venetian glass that rest so lightly on their threadlike stems. An odor of luxury and sensuality floated through the apartment. The lamps that burned in every direction seemed to diffuse a subtle incense on the air, and in a large vase that stood on the floor I saw a mass of magnolias, tuberoses, and jasmines grouped together, stifling each other with their honeyed and heavy fragrance.

The inhabitants of my room seemed beings well suited to so sensual an atmosphere. The women were strangely beautiful, and all were attired in dresses of the most fantastic devices and brilliant hues. Their figures were round, supple, and elastic; their eyes dark and languishing; their lips full, ripe, and of the richest bloom. The three men wore half-masks, so that all I could distinguish were heavy jaws, pointed beards, and brawny throats that rose

like massive pillars out of their doublets. All six lay reclining on Roman couches about the table, drinking down the purple wines in large draughts, and tossing back their heads and laughing wildly.

I stood, I suppose, for some three minutes, with my back against the wall staring vacantly at the bacchanal vision, before any of the revellers appeared to notice my presence. At length, without any expression to indicate whether I had been observed from the beginning or not, two of the women arose from their couches, and, approaching, took each a hand and led me to the table. I obeyed their motions mechanically. I sat on a couch between them as they indicated. I unresistingly permitted them to wind their arms about my neck.

"You must drink," said one, pouring out a large glass of red wine, "here is Clos Vougeot of a rare vintage; and here," pushing a flask of amber-hued wine before me, "is Lachryma Christi."

"You must eat," said the other, drawing the silver dishes toward her. "Here are cutlets stewed with olives, and here are slices of a *filet* stuffed with bruised sweet chestnuts";—and as she spoke, she, without waiting for a reply, proceeded to help me.

The sight of the food recalled to me the warnings I had received in the garden. This sudden effort of memory restored to me my other faculties at the same instant. I sprang to my feet, thrusting the women from me with each hand.

"Demons!" I almost shouted, "I will have none of your accursed food. I know you. You are canni-

bals, you are ghouls, you are enchanters. Begone, I tell you! Leave my room in peace!"

A shout of laughter from all six was the only effect that my passionate speech produced. The men rolled on their couches, and their half-masks quivered with the convulsions of their mirth. The women shrieked, and tossed the slender wine-glasses wildly aloft, and turned to me and flung themselves on my bosom fairly sobbing with laughter.

"Yes," I continued, as soon as the noisy mirth had subsided, "yes, I say, leave my room instantly! I will have none of your unnatural orgies here!"

"His room!" shrieked the woman on my right.

"His room!" echoed she on my left.

"His room! He calls it his room!" shouted the whole party, as they rolled once more into jocular convulsions.

"How know you that it is your room?" said one of the men who sat opposite to me, at length, after the laughter had once more somewhat subsided.

"How do I know?" I replied, indignantly. "How do I know my own room? How could I mistake it, pray? There's my furniture—my piano—"

"He calls that a piano!" shouted my neighbors, again in convulsions as I pointed to the corner where my huge piano, sacred to the memory of Blokeeta, used to stand. "O, yes! It is his room. There—there is his piano!"

The peculiar emphasis they laid on the word "piano" caused me to scrutinize the article I was indicating more thoroughly. Up to this time, though

utterly amazed at the entrance of these people into my chamber, and connecting them somewhat with the wild stories I had heard in the garden, I still had a sort of indefinite idea that the whole thing was a masquerading freak got up in my absence, and that the bacchanalian orgy I was witnessing was nothing more than a portion of some elaborate hoax of which I was to be the victim. But when my eyes turned to the corner where I had left a huge and cumbrous piano, and beheld a vast and sombre organ lifting its fluted front to the very ceiling, and convinced myself, by a hurried process of memory, that it occupied the very spot in which I had left my own instrument, the little self-possession that I had left forsook me. I gazed around me bewildered.

In like manner everything was changed. In the place of that old haftless dagger, connected with so many historic associations personal to myself, I beheld a Turkish yataghan dangling by its belt of crimson silk, while the jewels in the hilt blazed as the lamplight played upon them. In the spot where hung my cherished smoking-cap, memorial of a buried love, a knightly casque was suspended, on the crest of which a golden dragon stood in the act of springing. That strange lithograph by Calame was no longer a lithograph, but it seemed to me that the portion of the wall which it had covered, of the exact shape and size, had been cut out, and, in place of the picture, a *real* scene on the same scale, and with real actors, was distinctly visible. The old oak was there, and the stormy sky was there; but I saw

the branches of the oak sway with the tempest, and the clouds drive before the wind. The wanderer in his cloak was gone; but in his place I beheld a circle of wild figures, men and women, dancing with linked hands around the bole of the great tree, chanting some wild fragment of a song, to which the winds roared an unearthly chorus. The snow-shoes, too, on whose sinewy woof I had sped for many days amidst Canadian wastes, had vanished, and in their place lay a pair of strange up-curled Turkish slippers, that had, perhaps, been many a time shuffled off at the doors of mosques, beneath the steady blaze of an orient sun.

All was changed. Wherever my eyes turned they missed familiar objects, yet encountered strange representatives. Still, in all the substitutes there seemed to me a reminiscence of what they replaced. They seemed only for a time transmuted into other shapes, and there lingered around them the atmosphere of what they once had been. Thus I could have sworn the room to have been mine, yet there was nothing in it that I could rightly claim. Everything reminded me of some former possession that it was not. I looked for the acacia at the window, and, lo! long, silken palm-leaves swayed in through the open lattice; yet they had the same motion and the same air of my favorite tree, and seemed to murmur to me, "Though we seem to be palm-leaves, yet are we acacia-leaves; yea, those very ones on which you used to watch the butterflies alight and the rain patter while you smoked and dreamed!" So in all

things; the room was, yet was not, mine; and a sickening consciousness of my utter inability to reconcile its identity with its appearance overwhelmed me, and choked my reason.

"Well, have you determined whether or not this is your room?" asked the girl on my left, proffering me a huge tumbler creaming over with champagne, and laughing wickedly as she spoke.

"It is mine," I answered, doggedly, striking the glass rudely with my hand, and dashing the aromatic wine over the white cloth. "I know that it is mine; and ye are jugglers and enchanters who want to drive me mad."

"Hush! hush!" she said, gently, not in the least angered at my rough treatment. "You are excited. Alf shall play something to soothe you."

At her signal, one of the men sat down at the organ. After a short, wild, spasmodic prelude, he began what seemed to me to be a symphony of recollections. Dark and sombre, and all through full of quivering and intense agony, it appeared to recall a dark and dismal night, on a cold reef, around which an unseen but terribly audible ocean broke with eternal fury. It seemed as if a lonely pair were on the reef, one living, the other dead; one clasping his arms around the tender neck and naked bosom of the other, striving to warm her into life, when his own vitality was being each moment sucked from him by the icy breath of the storm. Here and there a terrible wailing minor key would tremble through the chords like the shriek of sea-birds, or the warning

of advancing death. While the man played I could scarce restrain myself. It seemed to be Blokeeta whom I listened to, and on whom I gazed. That wondrous night of pleasure and pain that I had once passed listening to him seemed to have been taken up again at the spot where it had broken off, and the same hand was continuing it. I stared at the man called Alf. There he sat with his cloak and doublet, and long rapier and mask of black velvet. But there was something in the air of the peaked beard, a familiar mystery in the wild mass of raven hair that fell as if wind-blown over his shoulders, which riveted my memory.

"Blokeeta! Blokeeta!" I shouted, starting up furiously from the couch on which I was lying, and bursting the fair arms that were linked around my neck as if they had been hateful chains,—"Blokeeta! my friend! speak to me, I entreat you! Tell these horrid enchanters to leave me. Say that I hate them. Say that I command them to leave my room."

The man at the organ stirred not in answer to my appeal. He ceased playing, and the dying sound of the last note he had touched faded off into a melancholy moan. The other men and the women burst once more into peals of mocking laughter.

"Why will you persist in calling this your room?" said the woman next me, with a smile meant to be kind, but to me inexpressibly loathsome. "Have we not shown you by the furniture, by the general appearance of the place, that you are mistaken, and that this cannot be your apartment? Rest content,

then, with us. You are welcome here, and need no longer trouble yourself about your room."

"Rest content?" I answered, madly; "live with ghosts! eat of awful meats, and see awful sights! Never, never! You have cast some enchantment over the place that has disguised it; but for all that I know it to be my room. You shall leave it!"

"Softly, softly!" said another of the sirens. "Let us settle this amicably. This poor gentleman seems obstinate and inclined to make an uproar. Now we do not want an uproar. We love the night and its quiet; and there is no night that we love so well as that on which the moon is coffined in clouds. Is it not so, my brothers?"

An awful and sinister smile gleamed on the countenances of her unearthly audience, and seemed to glide visibly from underneath their masks.

"Now," she continued, "I have a proposition to make. It would be ridiculous for us to surrender this room simply because this gentleman states that it is his; and yet I feel anxious to gratify, as far as may be fair, his wild assertion of ownership. A room, after all, is not much to us; we can get one easily enough, but still we should be loath to give this apartment up to so imperious a demand. We are willing, however, to *risk* its loss. That is to say,"—turning to me,—"I propose that we play for the room. If you win, we will immediately surrender it to you just as it stands; if, on the contrary, you lose, you shall bind yourself to depart and never molest us again."

Agonized at the ever-darkening mysteries that seemed to thicken around me, and despairing of being able to dissipate them by the mere exercise of my own will, I caught almost gladly at the chance thus presented to me. The idea of my loss or my gain scarce entered into my calculations. All I felt was an indefinite knowledge that I might, in the way proposed, regain, in an instant, that quiet chamber and that peace of mind of which I had so strangely been deprived.

"I agree," I cried, eagerly; "I agree. Anything to rid myself of such unearthly company!"

The woman touched a small golden bell that stood near her on the table, and it had scarce ceased to tinkle when a negro dwarf entered with a silver tray on which were dice-boxes and dice. A shudder passed over me as I thought in this stunted African I could trace a resemblance to the ghoul-like black servant to whose attendance I had been accustomed.

"Now," said my neighbor, seizing one of the dice-boxes and giving me the other, "the highest wins. Shall I throw first?"

I nodded assent. She rattled the dice, and I felt an inexpressible load lifted from my heart as she threw fifteen.

"It is your turn," she said, with a mocking smile; "but before you throw, I repeat the offer I made you before. Live with us. Be one of us. We will initiate you into our mysteries and enjoyments,—enjoyments of which you can form no idea unless you ex-

perience them. Come; it is not too late yet to change your mind. Be with us!"

My reply was a fierce oath, as I rattled the dice with spasmodic nervousness and flung them on the board. They rolled over and over again, and during that brief instant I felt a suspense, the intensity of which I have never known before or since. At last they lay before me. A shout of the same horrible, maddening laughter rang in my ears. I peered in vain at the dice, but my sight was so confused that I could not distinguish the amount of the cast. This lasted for a few moments. Then my sight grew clear, and I sank back almost lifeless with despair as I saw that I had thrown but *twelve!*

"Lost! Lost!" screamed my neighbor, with a wild laugh. "Lost! Lost!" shouted the deep voices of the masked men. "Leave us, coward!" they all cried; "you are not fit to be one of us. Remember your promise; leave us!"

Then it seemed as if some unseen power caught me by the shoulders and thrust me toward the door. In vain I resisted. In vain I screamed and shouted for help. In vain I implored them for pity. All the reply I had was those mocking peals of merriment, while, under the invisible influence, I staggered like a drunken man toward the door. As I reached the threshold the organ pealed out a wild, triumphal strain. The power that impelled me concentrated itself into one vigorous impulse that sent me blindly staggering out into the echoing corridor, and, as the door closed swiftly behind

me, I caught one glimpse of the apartment I had left forever. A change passed like a shadow over it. The lamps died out, the siren women and masked men had vanished, the flowers, the fruits, the bright silver and bizarre furniture faded swiftly, and I saw again, for the tenth of a second, my own old chamber restored. There was the acacia waving darkly; there was the table littered with books; there was the ghostly lithograph, the dearly beloved smoking-cap, the Canadian snow-shoes, the ancestral dagger. And there, at the piano, organ no longer, sat Blokeeta playing.

The next instant the door closed violently, and I was left standing in the corridor stunned and despairing.

As soon as I had partially recovered my comprehension I rushed madly to the door, with the dim idea of beating it in. My fingers touched a cold and solid wall. There was no door! I felt all along the corridor for many yards on both sides. There was not even a crevice to give me hope. I rushed down stairs shouting madly. No one answered. In the vestibule I met the negro; I seized him by the collar, and demanded my room. The demon showed his white and awful teeth, which were filed into a saw-like shape, and, extricating himself from my grasp with a sudden jerk, fled down the passage with a gibbering laugh. Nothing but echo answered to my despairing shrieks. The lonely garden resounded with my cries as I strode madly through the dark walks, and the tall funereal cypresses seemed to bury

me beneath their heavy shadows. I met no one,—could find no one. I had to bear my sorrow and despair alone.

Since that awful hour I have never found my room. Everywhere I look for it, yet never see it. Shall I ever find it?

THE POT OF TULIPS

TWENTY-EIGHT years ago I went to spend the summer at an old Dutch villa which then lifted its head from the wild country that, in present days, has been tamed down into a site for a Crystal Palace. Madison Square was then a wilderness of fields and scrub oak, here and there diversified with tall and stately elms. Worthy citizens who could afford two establishments rusticated in the groves that then flourished where ranks of brown-stone porticos now form the landscape; and the locality of Fortieth Street, where my summer palace stood, was justly looked upon as at an enterprising distance from the city.

I had an imperious desire to live in this house ever since I can remember. I had often seen it when a boy, and its cool verandas and quaint garden seemed, whenever I passed, to attract me irresistibly. In after years, when I grew up to man's estate, I was not sorry, therefore, when one summer, fatigued with the labors of my business, I beheld a notice in the papers intimating that it was to be let furnished. I hastened to my dear friend, Jasper Joye, painted the delights of this rural retreat in the most glowing colors, easily obtained his assent to share the enjoyments and the expense with me, and a month

afterward we were taking our ease in this new paradise.

Independent of early associations, other interests attached me to this house. It was somewhat historical, and had given shelter to George Washington on the occasion of one of his visits to the city. Furthermore, I knew the descendants of the family to whom it had originally belonged. Their history was strange and mournful, and it seemed to me as if their individuality was somehow shared by the edifice. It had been built by a Mr. Van Koeren, a gentleman of Holland, the younger son of a rich mercantile firm at The Hague, who had emigrated to this country in order to establish a branch of his father's business in New York, which even then gave indications of the prosperity it has since reached with such marvellous rapidity. He had brought with him a fair young Belgian wife; a loving girl, if I may believe her portrait, with soft brown eyes, chestnut hair, and a deep, placid contentment spreading over her fresh and innocent features. Her son, Alain Van Koeren, had her picture—an old miniature in a red gold frame—as well as that of his father; and in truth, when looking on the two, one could not conceive a greater contrast than must have existed between husband and wife. Mr. Van Koeren must have been a man of terrible will and gloomy temperament. His face—in the picture—is dark and austere, his eyes deep-sunken, and burning as if with a slow, inward fire. The lips are thin and compressed, with much determination of purpose;

and his chin, boldly salient, is brimful of power and resolution. When first I saw those two pictures I sighed inwardly and thought, "Poor child! you must often have sighed for the sunny meadows of Brussels, in the long, gloomy nights spent in the company of that terrible man!"

I was not far wrong, as I afterward discovered. Mr. and Mrs. Van Koeren were very unhappy. Jealousy was his monomania, and he had scarcely been married before his girl-wife began to feel the oppression of a gloomy and ceaseless tyranny. Every man under fifty, whose hair was not white and whose form was erect, was an object of suspicion to this Dutch Bluebeard. Not that he was vulgarly jealous. He did not frown at his wife before strangers, or attack her with reproaches in the midst of her festivities. He was too well-bred a man to bare his private woes to the world. But at night, when the guests had departed and the dull light of the quaint old Flemish lamps but half illuminated the nuptial chamber, then it was that with monotonous invective Mr. Van Koeren crushed his wife. And Marie, weeping and silent, would sit on the edge of the bed listening to the cold, trenchant irony of her husband, who, pacing up and down the room, would now and then stop in his walk to gaze with his burning eyes upon the pallid face of his victim. Even the evidences that Marie gave of becoming a mother did not check him. He saw in that coming event, which most husbands anticipate with mingled joy and fear, only an approaching incarnation of his

dishonor. He watched with a horrible refinement of suspicion for the arrival of that being in whose features he madly believed he should but too surely trace the evidences of his wife's crime.

Whether it was that these ceaseless attacks wore out her strength, or that Providence wished to add another chastening misery to her burden of woe, I dare not speculate; but it is certain that one luckless night Mr. Van Koeren learned with fury that he had become a father two months before the allotted time. During his first paroxysm of rage, on the receipt of intelligence which seemed to confirm all his previous suspicions, it was, I believe, with difficulty that he was prevented from slaying both the innocent causes of his resentment. The caution of his race and the presence of the physicians induced him, however, to put a curb upon his furious will until reflection suggested quite as criminal, if not as dangerous, a vengeance. As soon as his poor wife had recovered from her illness, unnaturally prolonged by the delicacy of constitution induced by previous mental suffering, she was astonished to find, instead of increasing his persecutions, that her husband had changed his tactics and treated her with studied neglect. He rarely spoke to her except on occasions when the decencies of society demanded that he should address her. He avoided her presence, and no longer inhabited the same apartments. He seemed, in short, to strive as much as possible to forget her existence. But if she did not suffer from personal ill-treatment it was because a punishment

more acute was in store for her. If Mr. Van Koeren had chosen to affect to consider her beneath his vengeance, it was because his hate had taken another direction, and seemed to have derived increased intensity from the alteration. It was upon the unhappy boy, the cause of all this misery, that the father lavished a terrible hatred. Mr. Van Koeren seemed determined, that, if this child sprang from other loins than his, the mournful destiny which he forced upon him should amply avenge his own existence and the infidelity of his mother. While the child was an infant his plan seemed to have been formed. Ignorance and neglect were the two deadly influences with which he sought to assassinate the moral nature of this boy; and his terrible campaign against the virtue of his own son was, as he grew up, carried into execution with the most consummate generalship. He gave him money, but debarred him from education. He allowed him liberty of action, but withheld advice. It was in vain that his mother, who foresaw the frightful consequences of such a training, sought in secret by every means in her power to nullify her husband's attempts. She strove in vain to seduce her son into an ambition to be educated. She beheld with horror all her agonized efforts frustrated, and saw her son and only child becoming, even in his youth, a drunkard and a libertine. In the end it proved too much for her strength; she sickened, and went home to her sunny Belgian plains. There she lingered for a few months in a calm but rapid decay, whose calm-

ness was broken but by the one grief; until one autumn day, when the leaves were falling from the limes, she made a little prayer for her son to the good God, and died. Vain orison! Spendthrift, gamester, libertine, and drunkard by turns, Alain Van Koeren's earthly destiny was unchangeable. The father, who should have been his guide, looked on each fresh depravity of his son with a species of grim delight. Even the death of his wronged wife had no effect upon his fatal purpose. He still permitted the young man to run blindly to destruction by the course into which he himself had led him.

As years rolled by, and Mr. Van Koeren himself approached to that time of life when he might soon expect to follow his persecuted wife, he relieved himself of the hateful presence of his son altogether. Even the link of a systematic vengeance, which had hitherto united them, was severed, and Alain was cast adrift without either money or principle. The occasion of this final separation between father and son was the marriage of the latter with a girl of humble, though honest extraction. This was a good excuse for the remorseless Van Koeren, so he availed himself of it by turning his son out of doors. From that time forth they never met. Alain lived a life of meagre dissipation, and soon died, leaving behind him one child, a daughter. By a coincidence natural enough, Mr. Van Koeren's death followed his son's almost immediately. He died as he had lived, sternly. But those who were around his couch in his last moments mentioned some

singular facts connected with the manner of his death. A few moments before he expired, he raised himself in the bed, and seemed as if conversing with some person invisible to the spectators. His lips moved as if in speech, and immediately afterward he sank back, bathed in a flood of tears. "Wrong! wrong!" he was heard to mutter, feebly; then he implored passionately the forgiveness of some one who, he said, was present. The death struggle ensued almost immediately, and in the midst of his agony he seemed wrestling for speech. All that could be heard, however, were a few broken words. "I was wrong. My—unfounded— For God's sake look in— You will find—" Having uttered these fragmentary sentences, he seemed to feel that the power of speech had passed away forever. He fixed his eyes piteously on those around him, and, with a great sigh of grief, expired. I gathered these facts from his granddaughter and Alain's daughter, Alice Van Koeren, who had been summoned by some friend to her grandfather's dying couch when it was too late. It was the first time she had seen him, and then she saw him die.

The results of Mr. Van Koeren's death were a nine days' wonder to all the merchants in New York. Beyond a small sum in the bank, and the house in which he lived, which was mortgaged for its full value, Mr. Van Koeren had died a pauper! To those who knew him and knew his affairs, this seemed inexplicable. Five or six years before his death he had retired from business with a fortune

of several hundred thousand dollars. He had lived quietly since then,—was known not to have speculated, and could not have gambled. The question then was, where had his wealth vanished to. Search was made in every secretary, in every bureau, for some document which might throw a light on the mysterious disposition that he had made of his property. None was found. Neither will, nor certificates of stock, nor title deeds, nor bank accounts, were anywhere discernible. Inquiries were made at the offices of companies in which Mr. Van Koeren was known to be largely interested; he had sold out his stock years ago. Real estate that had been believed to be his was found on investigation to have passed into other hands. There could be no doubt that for some years past Mr. Van Koeren had been steadily converting all his property into money, and what he had done with that money no one knew. Alice Van Koeren and her mother, who at the old gentleman's death were at first looked on as millionaires, discovered, when all was over, that they were no better off than before. It was evident that the old man, determined that one whom, though bearing his name, he believed not to be of his blood, should never inherit his wealth or any share of it, had made away with his fortune before his death,—a posthumous vengeance which was the only one by which the laws of the State of New York relative to inheritance could be successfully evaded.

I took a peculiar interest in the case, and even helped to make some researches for the lost prop-

erty, not so much, I confess, from a spirit of general philanthropy, as from certain feelings which I experienced toward Alice Van Koeren, the heir to this invisible estate. I had long known both her and her mother, when they were living in honest poverty and earning a scanty subsistence by their own labor; Mrs. Van Koeren working as an embroideress, and Alice turning to account, as a preparatory governess, the education which her good mother, in spite of her limited means, had bestowed on her.

In a few words, then, I loved Alice Van Koeren, and was determined to make her my wife as soon as my means would allow me to support a fitting establishment. My passion had never been declared. I was content for the time with the secret consciousness of my own love, and the no less grateful certainty that Alice returned it, all unuttered as it was. I had, therefore, a double interest in passing the summer at the old Dutch villa, for I felt it to be connected somehow with Alice, and I could not forget the singular desire to inhabit it which I had so often experienced as a boy.

It was a lovely day in June when Jasper Joye and myself took up our abode in our new residence; and as we smoked our cigars on the piazza in the evening we felt for the first time the unalloyed pleasure with which a townsman breathes the pure air of the country.

The house and grounds had a quaint sort of beauty that to me was eminently pleasing. Landscape gardening, in the modern acceptation of the

term, was then almost unknown in this country, and the "laying out" of the garden that surrounded our new home would doubtless have shocked Mr. Loudon, the late Mr. Downing, or Sir Thomas Dick Lauder. It was formal and artificial to the last degree. The beds were cut into long parallelograms, rigid and severe of aspect, and edged with prim rows of stiff dwarf box. The walks, of course, crossed always at right angles, and the laurel and cypress trees that grew here and there were clipped into cones, and spheres, and rhomboids. It is true that, at the time my friend and I hired the house, years of neglect had restored to this formal garden somewhat of the raggedness of nature. The box edgings were rank and wild. The clipped trees, forgetful of geometric propriety, flourished into unauthorized boughs and rebel offshoots. The walks were green with moss, and the beds of Dutch tulips, which had been planted in the shape of certain gorgeous birds, whose colors were represented by masses of blossoms, each of a single hue, had transgressed their limits, and the purple of a parrot's wings might have been seen running recklessly into the crimson of his head; while, as bulbs, however well-bred, will create other bulbs, the flower-birds of this queer old Dutch garden became in time abominably distorted in shape;—flamingoes with humps, golden pheasants with legs preternaturally elongated, macaws afflicted with hydrocephalus,—each species of deformity being proportioned to the rapidity with which the roots had spread in some par-

ticular direction. Still, this strange mixture of raggedness and formality, this conglomerate of nature and art, had its charms. It was pleasant to watch the struggle, as it were, between the opposing elements, and to see nature triumphing by degrees in every direction.

The house itself was pleasant and commodious. Rooms that, though not lofty, were spacious; wide windows, and cool piazzas extending over the four sides of the building; and a collection of antique carved furniture, some of which, from its elaborateness, might well have come from the chisel of Master Grinling Gibbons. There was a mantel-piece in the dining-room, with which I remember being very much struck when first I came to take possession. It was a singular and fantastical piece of carving. It was a perfect tropical garden, menagerie, and aviary, in one. Birds, beasts, and flowers were sculptured on the wood with exquisite correctness of detail, and painted with the hues of nature. The Dutch taste for color was here fully gratified. Parrots, love-birds, scarlet lories, blue-faced baboons, crocodiles, passion-flowers, tigers, Egyptian lilies, and Brazilian butterflies, were all mixed in gorgeous confusion. The artist, whoever he was, must have been an admirable naturalist, for the ease and freedom of his carving were only equalled by the wonderful accuracy with which the different animals were represented. Altogether it was one of those oddities of Dutch conception, whose strange-

ness was in this instance redeemed by the excellence of the execution.

Such was the establishment that Jasper Joye and myself were to inhabit for the summer months.

"What a strange thing it was," said Jasper, as we lounged on the piazza together the night of our arrival, "that old Van Koeren's property should never have turned up!"

"It is a question with some people whether he had any at his death," I answered.

"Pshaw! every one knows that he did not or could not have lost that with which he retired from business."

"It is strange," said I, thoughtfully; "yet every possible search has been made for documents that might throw light on the mystery. I have myself sought in every quarter for traces of this lost wealth, but in vain."

"Perhaps he buried it," suggested Jasper, laughing; "if so, we may find it here in a hole one fine morning."

"I think it much more likely that he destroyed it," I replied. "You know he never could be got to believe that Alain Van Koeren was his son, and I believe him quite capable of having flung all his money into the sea in order to prevent those whom he considered not of his blood inheriting it, which they must have done under our laws."

"I am sorry that Alice did not become an heiress, both for your sake and hers. She is a charming girl."

Jasper, from whom I concealed nothing, knew of my love.

"As to that," I answered, "it is little matter. I shall in a year or two be independent enough to marry, and can afford to let Mr. Van Koeren's cherished gold sleep wherever he has concealed it."

"Well, I'm off to bed," said Jasper, yawning. "This country air makes one sleepy early. Be on the lookout for trap-doors and all that sort of thing, old fellow. Who knows but the old chap's dollars will turn up. Good night!"

"Good night, Jasper!"

So we parted for the night. He to his room, which lay on the west side of the building; I to mine on the east, situated at the end of a long corridor and exactly opposite to Jasper's.

The night was very still and warm. The clearness with which I heard the song of the katydid and the croak of the bull-frog seemed to make the silence more distinct. The air was dense and breathless, and, although longing to throw wide my windows, I dared not; for outside, the ominous trumpetings of an army of mosquitoes sounded threateningly.

I tossed on my bed oppressed with the heat; kicked the sheets into every spot where they ought not to be; turned my pillow every two minutes in the hope of finding a cool side;—in short, did everything that a man does when he lies awake on a very hot night and cannot open his window.

Suddenly, in the midst of my miseries, and when I had made up my mind to fling open the casement

in spite of the legion of mosquitoes that I knew were hungrily waiting outside, I felt a continuous stream of cold air blowing upon my face. Luxurious as the sensation was, I could not help starting as I felt it. Where could this draught come from? The door was closed; so were the windows. It did not come from the direction of the fireplace, and, even if it did, the air without was too still to produce so strong a current. I rose in my bed and gazed round the room, the whole of which, though only lit by a dim twilight, was still sufficiently visible. I thought at first it was a trick of Jasper's, who might have provided himself with a bellows or a long tube; but a careful investigation of the apartment convinced me that no one was present. Besides, I had locked the door, and it was not likely that any one had been concealed in the room before I entered it. It was exceedingly strange; but still the draught of cool wind blew on my face and chest, every now and then changing its direction,—sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other. I am not constitutionally nervous, and had been too long accustomed to reflect on philosophical subjects to become the prey of fear in the presence of mysterious phenomena. I had devoted much time to the investigation of what are popularly called supernatural matters, by those who have not reflected or examined sufficiently to discover that none of these apparent miracles are *super*-natural, but all, however singular, directly dependent on certain natural laws. I became speedily convinced, therefore, as I sat up in my bed peering

into the dim recesses of my chamber, that this mysterious wind was the effect or forerunner of a supernatural visitation, and I mentally determined to investigate it, as it developed itself, with a philosophical calmness.

"Is any one in this room?" I asked, as distinctly as I could. No reply; while the cool wind still swept over my cheek. I knew, in the case of Elizabeth Eslinger, who was visited by an apparition while in the Weinsberg jail, and whose singular and apparently authentic experiences were made the subject of a book by Dr. Kerner, that the manifestation of the spirit was invariably accompanied by such a breezy sensation as I now experienced. I therefore gathered my will, as it were, into a focus, and endeavored, as much as lay in my power, to put myself in accord with the disembodied spirit, if such there were, knowing that on such conditions alone would it be enabled to manifest itself to me.

Presently it seemed as if a luminous cloud was gathering in one corner of the room,—a sort of dim phosphoric vapor, shadowy and ill-defined. It changed its position frequently, sometimes coming nearer and at others retreating to the furthest end of the room. As it grew intenser and more radiant, I observed a sickening and corpse-like odor diffuse itself through the chamber, and, despite my anxiety to witness this phenomenon undisturbed, I could with difficulty conquer a feeling of faintness which oppressed me.

The luminous cloud now began to grow brighter

and brighter as I gazed. The horrible odor of which I have spoken did not cease to oppress me, and gradually I could discover certain lines making themselves visible in the midst of this lambent radiance. These lines took the form of a human figure,—a tall man, clothed in a long dressing-robe, with a pale countenance, burning eyes, and a very bold and prominent chin. At a glance I recognized the original of the picture of old Van Koeren that I had seen with Alice. My interest was now aroused to the highest point; I felt that I stood face to face with a spirit, and doubted not that I should learn the fate of the old man's mysteriously concealed wealth.

The spirit presented a very strange appearance. He himself was not luminous, except some tongues of fire that seemed to proceed from the tips of his fingers, but was completely surrounded by a thin gauze of light, so to speak, through which his outlines were visible. His head was bare, and his white hair fell in huge masses around his stern, saturnine face. As he moved on the floor, I distinctly heard a strange crackling sound, such as one hears when a substance has been overcharged with electricity. But the circumstance that seemed to me most incomprehensible connected with the apparition was that Van Koeren held in both hands a curiously painted flower-pot, out of which sprang a number of the most beautiful tulips in full blossom. He seemed very uneasy and agitated, and moved about the room as if in pain, frequently bending over the pot of tulips

as if to inhale their odor, then holding it out to me, seemingly in the hope of attracting my attention to it. I was, I confess, very much puzzled. I knew that Mr. Van Koeren had in his lifetime devoted much of his leisure to the cultivation of flowers, importing from Holland the most expensive and rarest bulbs; but how this innocent fancy could trouble him after death I could not imagine. I felt assured, however, that some important reason lay at the bottom of this spectral eccentricity, and determined to fathom it if I could.

"What brings you here?" I asked audibly; directing mentally, however, at the same time, the question to the spirit with all the power of my will. He did not seem to hear me, but still kept moving uneasily about, with the crackling noise I have mentioned, and holding the pot of tulips toward me.

"It is evident," I said to myself, "that I am not sufficiently in accord with this spirit for him to make himself understood by speech. He has, therefore, recourse to symbols. The pot of tulips is a symbol. But of what?"

Thus reflecting on these things I continued to gaze upon the spirit. While observing him attentively, he approached my bedside by a rapid movement, and laid one hand on my arm. The touch was icy cold, and pained me at the moment. Next morning my arm was swollen, and marked with a round blue spot. Then, passing to my bedroom-door, the spirit opened it and went out, shutting it behind him. Catching for a moment at the idea that I was the

dupe of a trick, I jumped out of bed and ran to the door. It was locked with the key on the inside, and a brass safety-bolt, which lay above the lock, shot safely home. All was as I had left it on going to bed. Yet I declare most solemnly, that, as the ghost made his exit, I not only saw the door open, but *I saw the corridor outside,* and *distinctly observed a large picture of William of Orange that hung just opposite to my room.* This to me was the most curious portion of the phenomena I had witnessed. Either the door had been opened by the ghost, and the resistance of physical obstacle overcome in some amazing manner,—because in this case the bolts must have been replaced when the ghost was *outside* the door,—or he must have had a sufficient magnetic accord with my mind to impress upon it the belief that the door was opened, and also to conjure up in my brain the vision of the corridor and the picture, features that I should have seen if the door had been opened by any ordinary physical agency.

The next morning at breakfast I suppose my manner must have betrayed me, for Jasper said to me, after staring at me for some time, "Why, Harry Escott, what's the matter with you? You look as if you had seen a ghost!"

"So I have, Jasper."

Jasper, of course, burst into laughter, and said he'd shave my head and give me a shower-bath.

"Well, you may laugh," I answered; "but you shall see it to-night, Jasper."

He became serious in a moment,—I suppose

there was something earnest in my manner that convinced him that my words were not idle,—and asked me to explain. I described my interview as accurately as I could.

"How did you know that it was old Van Koeren?" he asked.

"Because I have seen his picture a hundred times with Alice," I answered, "and this apparition was as like it as it was possible for a ghost to be like a miniature."

"You must not think I'm laughing at you, Harry," he continued, "but I wish you would answer this. We have all heard of ghosts,—ghosts of men, women, children, dogs, horses, in fact every living animal; but hang me if ever I heard of the ghost of a flower-pot before."

"My dear Jasper, you would have heard of such things if you had studied such branches of learning. All the phenomena I witnessed last night are supportable by well-authenticated facts. The cool wind has attended the appearance of more than one ghost, and Baron Reichenbach asserts that his patients, who you know are for the most part sensitive to apparitions, invariably feel this wind when a magnet is brought close to their bodies. With regard to the flower-pot about which you make so merry, it is to me the least wonderful portion of the apparition. When a ghost is unable to find a person of sufficient receptivity, in order to communicate with him by speech it is obliged to have recourse to symbols to express its wishes. These it either creates by some

mysterious power out of the surrounding atmosphere, or it impresses, by magnetic force on the mind of the person it visits, the form of the symbol it is anxious to have represented. There is an instance mentioned by Jung Stilling of a student at Brunswick, who appeared to a professor of his college, with a picture in his hands, which picture had a hole in it that the ghost thrust his head through. For a long time this symbol was a mystery; but the student was persevering, and appeared every night with his head through the picture, until at last it was discovered that, before he died, he had got some painted slides for a magic lantern from a shopkeeper in the town, which had not been paid for at his death; and when the debt had been discharged, he and his picture vanished forevermore. Now here was a symbol distinctly bearing on the question at issue. This poor student could find no better way of expressing his uneasiness at the debt for the painted slides than by thrusting his head through a picture. How he conjured up the picture I cannot pretend to explain, but that it was used as a symbol is evident."

"Then you think the flower-pot of old Van Koeren is a symbol?"

"Most assuredly, the pot of tulips he held was intended to express that which he could not speak. I think it must have had some reference to his missing property, and it is our business to discover in what manner."

"Let us go and dig up all the tulip beds," said

Jasper, "who knows but he may have buried his money in one of them?"

I grieve to say that I assented to Jasper's proposition, and on that eventful day every tulip in that quaint old garden was ruthlessly uprooted. The gorgeous macaws, and ragged parrots, and long-legged pheasants, so cunningly formed by those brilliant flowers, were that day exterminated. Jasper and I had a regular *battue* amidst this floral preserve, and many a splendid bird fell before our unerring spades. We, however, dug in vain. No secret coffer turned up out of the deep mould of the flower-beds. We evidently were not on the right scent. Our researches for that day terminated, and Jasper and myself waited impatiently for the night.

It was arranged that Jasper should sleep in my room. I had a bed rigged up for him near my own, and I was to have the additional assistance of his senses in the investigation of the phenomena that we so confidently expected to appear.

The night came. We retired to our respective couches, after carefully bolting the doors, and subjecting the entire apartment to the strictest scrutiny, rendering it totally impossible that a secret entrance should exist unknown to us. We then put out the lights, and awaited the apparition.

We did not remain in suspense long. About twenty minutes after we retired to bed, Jasper called out, "Harry, I feel the cool wind!"

"So do I," I answered, for at that moment a light breeze seemed to play across my temples.

"Look, look, Harry!" continued Jasper in a tone of painful eagerness, "I see a light—there in the corner!"

It was the phantom. As before, the luminous cloud appeared to gather in the room, growing more and more intense each minute. Presently the dark lines mapped themselves out, as it were, in the midst of this pale, radiant vapor, and there stood Mr. Van Koeren, ghastly and mournful as ever, with the pot of tulips in his hands.

"Do you see it?" I asked Jasper.

"My God! yes," said Jasper, in a low voice. "How terrible he looks!"

"Can you speak to me, to-night?" I said, addressing the apparition, and again concentrating my will upon my question. "If so, unburden yourself. We will assist you, if we can."

There was no reply. The ghost preserved the same sad, impassive countenance; he had heard me not. He seemed in great distress on this occasion, moving up and down and holding out the pot of tulips imploringly toward me, each motion of his being accompanied by the crackling noise and the corpse-like odor. I felt sorely troubled myself to see this poor spirit torn by an endless grief,—so anxious to communicate to me what lay on his soul, and yet debarred by some occult power from the privilege.

"Why, Harry," cried Jasper after a silence, during which we both watched the motions of the ghost

intently, "why, Harry, my boy, there are *two* of them!"

Astonished by his words, I looked around, and became immediately aware of the presence of a second luminous cloud, in the midst of which I could distinctly trace the figure of a pale but lovely woman. I needed no second glance to assure me that it was the unfortunate wife of Van Koeren.

"It is his wife, Jasper," I replied; "I recognize her, as I have recognized her husband, by the portrait."

"How sad she looks!" exclaimed Jasper in a low voice.

She did indeed look sad. Her face, pale and mournful, did not, however, seem convulsed with sorrow, as was her husband's. She seemed to be oppressed with a calm grief, and gazed with a look of interest that was painful in its intensity, on Van Koeren. It struck me, from his air, that, though she saw him, he did not see her. His whole attention was concentrated on the pot of tulips, while Mrs. Van Koeren, who floated at an elevation of about three feet from the floor, and thus overtopped her husband, seemed equally absorbed in the contemplation of his slightest movement. Occasionally she would turn her eyes on me, as if to call my attention to her companion, and then, returning, gaze on him with a sad, womanly, half-eager smile, that to me was inexpressibly mournful.

There was something exceedingly touching in this strange sight;—these two spirits so near, yet so

distant. The sinful husband torn with grief and weighed down with some terrible secret, and so blinded by the grossness of his being as to be unable to see the wife-angel who was watching over him; while she, forgetting all her wrongs, and attracted to earth by perhaps the same human sympathies, watched from a greater spiritual height, and with a tender interest, the struggles of her suffering spouse.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jasper, jumping from his bed, "I know what it means now."

"What does it mean?" I asked, as eager to know as he was to communicate.

"Well, that flower-pot that the old chap is holding—" Jasper, I grieve to say, was rather profane.

"Well, what of that flower-pot?"

"Observe the pattern. It has two handles made of red snakes, whose tails twist round the top and form a rim. It contains tulips of three colors, yellow, red, and purple."

"I see all that as well as you do. Let us have the solution."

"Well, Harry, my boy! dont you remember that there is just such a flower-pot, tulips, snakes and all, carved on the queer old painted mantel-piece in the dining-room."

"So there is!" and a gleam of hope shot across my brain, and my heart beat quicker.

"Now as sure as you are alive, Harry, the old fellow has concealed something important behind that mantel-piece."

"Jasper, if ever I am Emperor of France I will make you chief of police; your inductive reasoning is magnificent."

Actuated by the same impulse, and without another word, we both sprang out of bed and lit a candle. The apparitions, if they remained, were no longer visible in the light. Hastily throwing on some clothes, we rushed down stairs to the dining-room, determined to have the old mantel-piece down without loss of time. We had scarce entered the room when we felt the cool wind blowing on our faces.

"Jasper," said I, "they are here!"

"Well," answered Jasper, "that only confirms my suspicions that we are on the right track this time. Let us go to work. See! here's the pot of tulips."

This pot of tulips occupied the centre of the mantel-piece, and served as a nucleus round which all the fantastic animals sculptured elsewhere might be said to gather. It was carved on a species of raised shield, or boss, of wood, that projected some inches beyound the plane of the remainder of the mantel-piece. The pot itself was painted a brick color. The snakes were of bronze color, gilt, and the tulips—yellow, red, and purple—were painted after nature with the most exquisite accuracy.

For some time Jasper and myself tugged away at this projection without any avail. We were convinced that it was a movable panel of some kind, but yet were totally unable to move it. Suddenly it struck me that we had not yet twisted it. I imme-

diately proceeded to apply all my strength, and after a few seconds of vigorous exertion I had the satisfaction of finding it move slowly round. After giving it half a dozen turns, to my astonishment the long upper panel of the mantel-piece fell out toward us, apparently on concealed hinges, after the manner of the portion of escritoires that is used as a writing-table. Within were several square cavities sunk in the wall, and lined with wood. In one of these was a bundle of papers.

We seized these papers with avidity, and hastily glanced over them. They proved to be documents vouching for property to the amount of several hundred thousand dollars, invested in the name of Mr. Van Koeren in a certain firm at Bremen, who, no doubt, thought by this time that the money would remain unclaimed forever. The desires of these poor troubled spirits were accomplished. Justice to the child had been given through the instrumentality of the erring father.

The formulas necessary to prove Alice and her mother sole heirs to Mr. Van Koeren's estate were briefly gone through, and the poor governess passed suddenly from the task of teaching stupid children to the envied position of a great heiress. I had ample reason afterward for thinking that her heart did not change with her fortunes.

That Mr. Van Koeren became aware of his wife's innocence, just before he died, I have no doubt. How this was manifested I cannot of course say, but I think it highly probable that his poor wife herself

was enabled at the critical moment of dissolution, when the link that binds body and soul together is attenuated to the last thread, to put herself in accord with her unhappy husband. Hence his sudden starting up in his bed, his apparent conversation with some invisible being, and his fragmentary disclosures, too broken, however, to be comprehended.

The question of apparitions has been so often discussed that I feel no inclination to enter here upon the truth or fallacy of the ghostly theory. I myself believe in ghosts. Alice—my wife—believes in them firmly; and if it suited me to do so I could overwhelm you with a scientific theory of my own on the subject, reconciling ghosts and natural phenomena.

THE GOLDEN INGOT

I HAD just retired to rest, with my eyes almost blind with the study of a new work on physiology by M. Brown-Sequard, when the night-bell was pulled violently.

It was winter, and I confess I grumbled as I rose and went down stairs to open the door. Twice that week I had been aroused long after midnight for the most trivial causes. Once, to attend upon the son and heir of a wealthy family, who had cut his thumb with a penknife, which, it seems, he insisted on taking to bed with him; and once, to restore a young gentleman to consciousness, who had been found by his horrified parent stretched insensible on the staircase. Diachylon in the one case and ammonia in the other, were all that my patients required; and I had a faint suspicion that the present summons was perhaps occasioned by no case more necessitous than those I have quoted. I was too young in my profession, however, to neglect opportunities. It is only when a physician rises to a very large practice that he can afford to be inconsiderate. I was on the first step of the ladder, so I humbly opened my door.

A woman was standing ankle-deep in the snow that lay upon the stoop. I caught but a dim glimpse of her form, for the night was cloudy; but I could

hear her teeth rattling like castanets, and, as the sharp wind blew her clothes close to her form, I could discern from the sharpness of the outlines that she was very scantily supplied with raiment.

"Come in, come in, my good woman," I said hastily, for the wind seemed to catch eagerly at the opportunity of making itself at home in my hall, and was rapidly forcing an entrance through the half-open door. "Come in, you can tell me all you have to communicate inside."

She slipped in like a ghost, and I closed the door. While I was striking a light in my office, I could hear her teeth still clicking, out in the dark hall, till it seemed as if some skeleton was chattering. As soon as I obtained a light I begged her to enter the room, and, without occupying myself particularly about her appearance, asked her abruptly what her business was.

"My father has met with a severe accident," she said, "and requires instant surgical aid. I entreat you to come to him immediately."

The freshness and the melody of her voice startled me. Such voices rarely if ever issue from any but beautiful forms. I looked at her attentively, but, owing to a nondescript species of shawl in which her head was wrapped, I could discern nothing beyond what seemed to be a pale, thin face, and large eyes. Her dress was lamentable. An old silk, of a color now unrecognizable, clung to her figure in those limp folds which are so eloquent of misery. The creases where it had been folded were

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worn nearly through, and the edges of the skirt had decayed into a species of irregular fringe, which was clotted and discolored with mud. Her shoes—which were but half concealed by this scanty garment—were shapeless and soft with moisture. Her hands were hidden under the ends of the shawl which covered her head and hung down over a bust, the outlines of which, although angular, seemed to possess grace. Poverty, when partially shrouded, seldom fails to interest: witness the statue of the Veiled Beggar, by Monti.

"In what manner was your father hurt?" I asked, in a tone considerably softened from the one in which I put my first question.

"He blew himself up, sir, and is terribly wounded."

"Ah! He is in some factory then?"

"No, sir, he is a chemist."

"A chemist? Why, he is a brother professional. Wait an instant and I will slip on my coat and go with you. Do you live far from here?"

"In the Seventh Avenue, not more than two blocks from the end of this street."

"So much the better. We will be with him in a few minutes. Did you leave any one in attendance on him?"

"No, sir. He will allow no one but myself to enter his laboratory. And, injured as he is, I could not induce him to quit it."

"Indeed! He is engaged in some great research, perhaps? I have known such cases."

We were passing under a lamp-post, and the woman suddenly turned and glared at me with a look of such wild terror that for an instant I involuntarily glanced round me under the impression that some terrible peril, unseen by me, was menacing us both.

"Don't—don't ask me any questions," she said breathlessly. "He will tell you all. But do, O, do hasten! Good God! he may be dead by this time!"

I made no reply, but allowed her to grasp my hand, which she did with a bony, nervous clutch, and endeavored with some difficulty to keep pace with the long strides—I might well call them bounds, for they seemed the springs of a wild animal rather than the paces of a young girl—with which she covered the ground. Not a word more was uttered until we stopped before a shabby, old-fashioned tenement-house in the Seventh Avenue, not far above Twenty-Third Street. She pushed the door open with a convulsive pressure, and, still retaining hold of my hand, literally dragged me up-stairs to what seemed to be a back off-shoot from the main building, as high, perhaps, as the fourth story. In a moment more I found myself in a moderate-sized chamber, lit by a single lamp. In one corner, stretched motionless on a wretched pallet-bed, I beheld what I supposed to be the figure of my patient.

"He is there," said the girl; "go to him. See if he is dead,—I dare not look."

I made my way as well as I could through the

numberless dilapidated chemical instruments with which the room was littered. A French chafing-dish supported on an iron tripod had been overturned, and was lying across the floor, while the charcoal, still warm, was scattered around in various directions. Crucibles, alembics, and retorts were confusedly piled in various corners, and on a small table I saw distributed in separate bottles a number of mineral and metallic substances, which I recognized as antimony, mercury, plumbago, arsenic, borax, etc. It was veritably the apartment of a poor chemist. All the apparatus had the air of being second-hand. There was no lustre of exquisitely annealed glass and highly polished metals, such as dazzles one in the laboratory of the prosperous analyst. The make-shifts of poverty were everywhere visible. The crucibles were broken, or gallipots were used instead of crucibles. The colored tests were used not in the usual transparent vials, but were placed in ordinary black bottles. There is nothing more melancholy than to behold science or art in distress. A threadbare scholar, a tattered book, or a battered violin is a mute appeal to our sympathy.

I approached the wretched pallet-bed on which the victim of chemistry was lying. He breathed heavily, and had his head turned toward the wall. I lifted his arm gently to arouse his attention. "How goes it, my poor friend?" I asked him. "Where are you hurt?"

In a moment, as if startled by the sound of my

voice, he sprang up in his bed, and cowered against the wall like a wild animal driven to bay. "Who are you? I don't know you. Who brought you here? You are a stranger. How dare you come into my private rooms to spy upon me?"

And as he uttered this rapidly, with a frightful nervous energy, I beheld a pale distorted face, draped with long gray hair, glaring at me with a mingled expression of fury and terror.

"I am no spy," I answered mildly. "I heard that you had met with an accident, and have come to cure you. I am Doctor Luxor, and here is my card."

The old man took the card, and scanned it eagerly. "You are a physician?" he inquired distrustfully.

"And surgeon also."

"You are bound by oath not to reveal the secrets of your patients."

"Undoubtedly."

"I am afraid that I am hurt," he continued faintly, half sinking back in the bed.

I seized the opportunity to make a brief examination of his body. I found that the arms, a part of the chest, and a part of the face were terribly scorched; but it seemed to me that there was nothing to be apprehended but pain.

"You will not reveal anything that you may learn here?" said the old man feebly, fixing his eyes on my face while I was applying a soothing ointment to the burns. "You will promise me?"

I nodded assent.

"Then I will trust you. Cure me,—I will pay you well."

I could scarce help smiling. If Lorenzo de Medici, conscious of millions of ducats in his coffers, had been addressing some leech of the period, he could not have spoken with a loftier air than this inhabitant of the fourth story of a tenement-house in the Seventh Avenue.

"You must keep quiet," I answered. "Let nothing irritate you. I will leave a composing draught with your daughter, which she will give you immediately. I will see you in the morning. You will be well in a week."

"Thank God!" came in a murmur from a dusk corner near the door. I turned, and beheld the dim outline of the girl, standing with clasped hands in the gloom of the dim chamber.

"My daughter!" screamed the old man, once more leaping up in the bed with renewed vitality. "You have seen her, then? When? Where? O, may a thousand cur—"

"Father! father! Anything,—anything but that. Don't, don't curse me!" And the poor girl, rushing in, flung herself sobbing on her knees beside his pallet.

"Ah, brigand! you are there, are you? Sir," said he, turning to me, "I am the most unhappy man in the world. Talk of Sisyphus rolling the ever-recoiling stone,—of Prometheus gnawed by the vulture since the birth of time. The fables yet live. There

is my rock, forever crushing me back! there is my eternal vulture, feeding upon my heart! There! there! there!" And, with an awful gesture of malediction and hatred, he pointed with his wounded hand, swathed and shapeless with bandages, at the cowering, sobbing, wordless woman by his side.

I was too much horror-stricken to attempt even to soothe him. The anger of blood against blood has an electric power which paralyzes bystanders.

"Listen to me, sir," he continued, "while I skin this painted viper. I have your oath; you will not reveal. I am an alchemist, sir. Since I was twenty-two years old, I have pursued the wonderful and subtle secret. Yes, to unfold the mysterious Rose guarded with such terrible thorns; to decipher the wondrous Table of Emerald; to accomplish the mystic nuptials of the Red King and the White Queen; to marry them soul to soul and body to body for ever and ever, in the exact proportions of land and water,—such has been my sublime aim, such has been the splendid feat that I have accomplished."

I recognized at a glance, in this incomprehensible farrago, the *argot* of the true alchemist. Ripley, Flamel, and others have supplied the world, in their works, with the melancholy spectacle of a scientific Bedlam.

"Two years since," continued the poor man, growing more and more excited with every word that he uttered,—"two years since, I succeeded in solving the great problem,—in transmuting the baser metals into gold. None but myself, that girl, and God

know the privations I had suffered up to that time. Food, clothing, air, exercise, everything but shelter, was sacrificed toward the one great end. Success at last crowned my labors. That which Nicholas Flamel did in 1382, that which George Ripley did at Rhodes in 1460, that which Alexander Sethon and Michael Scudivogius did in the seventeenth century, I did in 1856. I made gold! I said to myself, 'I will astonish New York more than Flamel did Paris.' He was a poor copyist, and suddenly launched into magnificence. I had scarce a rag to my back: I would rival the Medicis. I made gold every day. I toiled night and morning; for I must tell you that I never was able to make more than a certain quantity at a time, and that by a process almost entirely dissimilar to those hinted at in those books of alchemy I had hitherto consulted. But I had no doubt that facility would come with experience, and that erelong I should be able to eclipse in wealth the richest sovereigns of the earth.

"So I toiled on. Day after day I gave to this girl here what gold I succeeded in fabricating, telling her to store it away after supplying our necessities. I was astonished to perceive that we lived as poorly as ever. I reflected, however, that it was perhaps a commendable piece of prudence on the part of my daughter. Doubtless, I said, she argues that the less we spend the sooner we shall accumulate a capital wherewith to live at ease; so, thinking her course a wise one, I did not reproach her with her niggardliness, but toiled on amid want, with closed lips.

"The gold which I fabricated was, as I said before, of an invariable size, namely, a little ingot worth perhaps thirty or forty-five dollars. In two years I calculated that I had made five hundred of these ingots, which, rated at an average of thirty dollars a piece, would amount to the gross sum of fifteen thousand dollars. After deducting our slight expenses for two years, we ought to have nearly fourteen thousand dollars left. It was time, I thought, to indemnify myself for my years of suffering, and surround my child and myself with such moderate comforts as our means allowed. I went to my daughter and explained to her that I desired to make an encroachment upon our little hoard. To my utter amazement she burst into tears, and told me that she had not got a dollar,—that all of our wealth had been stolen from her. Almost overwhelmed by this new misfortune, I in vain endeavored to discover from her in what manner our savings had been plundered. She could afford me no explanation beyond what I might gather from an abundance of sobs and a copious flow of tears.

"It was a bitter blow, Doctor, but *nil desperandum* was my motto, so I went to work at my crucible again, with redoubled energy, and made an ingot nearly every second day. I determined this time to put them in some secure place myself; but the very first day I set my apparatus in order for the projection, the girl Marian—that is my daughter's name—came weeping to me and implored me to allow her to take care of our treasure. I refused, decisively,

saying that, having found her already incapable of filling the trust, I could place no faith in her again. But she persisted, clung to my neck, threatened to abandon me, in short used so many of the bad but irresistible arguments known to women, that I had not the heart to refuse her. She has since that time continued to take the ingots.

"Yet you behold," continued the old alchemist, casting an inexpressibly mournful glance around the wretched apartment, "the way we live. Our food is insufficient and of bad quality; we never buy clothes; the rent of this hole is a mere nothing. What am I to think of the wretched girl who plunges me into this misery? Is she a miser, think you? or a female gamester? or—or—does she squander it riotously in places I know not of? O Doctor, Doctor! do not blame me if I heap imprecations on her head, for I have suffered bitterly!" The poor man here closed his eyes and sank back groaning on his bed.

This singular narrative excited in me the strangest emotions. I glanced at the girl Marian, who had been a patient listener to these horrible accusations of cupidity, and never did I behold a more angelic air of resignation than beamed over her countenance. It was impossible that any one with those pure, limpid eyes, that calm, broad forehead, that child-like mouth, could be such a monster of avarice or deceit as the old man represented. The truth was plain enough: the alchemist was mad,—what alchemist was there ever who was not?—and his insanity had taken this terrible shape. I felt an inexpressible

pity move my heart for this poor girl, whose youth was burdened with such an awful sorrow.

"What is your name?" I asked the old man, taking his tremulous, fevered hand in mine.

"William Blakelock," he answered. "I come of an old Saxon stock, sir, that bred true men and women in former days. God! how did it ever come to pass that such a one as that girl ever sprung from our line?" The glance of loathing and contempt that he cast at her made me shudder.

"May you not be mistaken in your daughter?" I said, very mildly. "Delusions with regard to alchemy are, or have been, very common—"

"What, sir?" cried the old man, bounding in his bed. "What? Do you doubt that gold can be made? Do you know, sir, that M. C. Théodore Tiffereau made gold at Paris, in the year 1854, in the presence of M. Levol, the assayer of the Imperial Mint, and the result of the experiments was read before the Academy of Sciences on the sixteenth of October of the same year? But stay; you shall have better proof yet. I will pay you with one of my ingots, and you shall attend me until I am well. Get me an ingot!"

This last command was addressed to Marian, who was still kneeling close to her father's bedside. I observed her with some curiosity as this mandate was issued. She became very pale, clasped her hands convulsively, but neither moved nor made any reply.

"Get me an ingot, I say!" reiterated the alchemist, passionately.

She fixed her large eyes imploringly upon him. Her lips quivered, and two huge tears rolled slowly down her white cheeks.

"Obey me, wretched girl," cried the old man in an agitated voice, "or I swear, by all that I reverence in heaven and earth, that I will lay my curse upon you forever!"

I felt for an instant that I ought perhaps to interfere, and spare the girl the anguish that she was so evidently suffering; but a powerful curiosity to see how this strange scene would terminate withheld me.

The last threat of her father, uttered as it was with a terrible vehemence, seemed to appall Marian. She rose with a sudden leap, as if a serpent had stung her, and, rushing into an inner apartment, returned with a small object in her hand, which she placed in mine, and then flung herself in a chair in a distant corner of the room, weeping bitterly.

"You see—you see," said the old man sarcastically, "how reluctantly she parts with it. Take it, sir; it is yours."

It was a small bar of metal. I examined it carefully, poised it in my hand,—the color, weight, everything, announced that it really was gold.

"You doubt its genuineness, perhaps," continued the alchemist. "There are acids on yonder table,—test it."

I confess that I *did* doubt its genuineness; but after I had acted upon the old man's suggestion, all further suspicion was rendered impossible. It

was gold of the highest purity. I was astounded. Was then, after all, this man's tale a truth? Was his daughter, that fair, angelic-looking creature, a demon of avarice, or a slave to worse passions? I felt bewildered. I had never met with anything so incomprehensible. I looked from father to daughter in the blankest amazement. I suppose that my countenance betrayed my astonishment, for the old man said, "I perceive that you are surprised. Well, that is natural. You had a right to think me mad until I proved myself sane."

"But, Mr. Blakelock," I said, "I really cannot take this gold. I have no right to it. I cannot in justice charge so large a fee."

"Take it,—take it," he answered impatiently; "your fee will amount to that before I am well. Besides," he added mysteriously, "I wish to secure your friendship. I wish that you should protect me from her,"—and he pointed his poor, bandaged hand at Marian.

My eye followed his gesture, and I caught the glance that replied,—a glance of horror, distrust, despair. The beautiful face was distorted into positive ugliness.

"It's all true," I thought; "she is the demon that her father represents her."

I now rose to go. This domestic tragedy sickened me. This treachery of blood against blood was too horrible to witness. I wrote a prescription for the old man, left directions as to the renewal of the

dressings upon his burns, and, bidding him good night, hastened towards the door.

While I was fumbling on the dark, crazy landing for the staircase, I felt a hand laid on my arm.

"Doctor," whispered a voice that I recognized as Marian Blakelock's, "Doctor, have you any compassion in your heart?"

"I hope so," I answered, shortly, shaking off her hand,—her touch filled me with loathing.

"Hush! don't talk so loud. If you have any pity in your nature give me back, I entreat of you, that gold ingot which my father gave you this evening."

"Great heaven!" said I, "can it be possible that so fair a woman can be such a mercenary, shameless wretch?"

"Ah! you know not,—I cannot tell you! Do not judge me harshly. I call God to witness that I am not what you deem me. Some day or other you will know. But," she added, interrupting herself, "the ingot,—where is it? I must have it. My life depends on your giving it to me."

"Take it, impostor!" I cried, placing it in her hand, that closed on it with a horrible eagerness. "I never intended to keep it. Gold made under the same roof that covers such as you must be accursed."

So saying, heedless of the nervous effort she made to detain me, I stumbled down the stairs and walked hastily home.

The next morning, while I was in my office, smoking my matutinal cigar, and speculating over the singular character of my acquaintance of last night,

the door opened, and Marian Blakelock entered. She had the same look of terror that I had observed the evening before, and she panted as if she had been running fast.

"Father has got out of bed," she gasped out, "and insists on going on with his alchemy. Will it kill him?"

"Not exactly," I answered, coldly. "It were better that he kept quiet, so as to avoid the chance of inflammation. However, you need not be alarmed; his burns are not at all dangerous, although painful."

"Thank God! thank God!" she cried, in the most impassioned accents; and, before I was aware of what she was doing, she seized my hand and kissed it.

"There, that will do," I said, withdrawing my hand; "you are under no obligations to me. You had better go back to your father."

"I can't go," she answered. "You despise me,—is it not so?"

I made no reply.

"You think me a monster,—a criminal. When you went home last night, you were wonder-struck that so vile a creature as I should have so fair a face."

"You embarrass me, madam," I said, in a most chilling tone. "Pray relieve me from this unpleasant position."

"Wait! I cannot bear that you should think ill of me. You are good and kind, and I desire to

possess your esteem. You little know how I love my father."

I could not restrain a bitter smile.

"You do not believe that? Well, I will convince you. I have had a hard struggle all last night with myself, but am now resolved. This life of deceit must continue no longer. Will you hear my vindication?"

I assented. The wonderful melody of her voice and the purity of her features were charming me once more. I half believed in her innocence already.

"My father has told you a portion of his history. But he did not tell you that his continued failures in his search after the secret of metallic transmutation nearly killed him. Two years ago he was on the verge of the grave, working every day at his mad pursuit, and every day growing weaker and more emaciated. I saw that if his mind was not relieved in some way he would die. The thought was madness to me, for I loved him,—I love him still, as a daughter never loved a father before. During all these years of poverty I had supported the house with my needle; it was hard work, but I did it,—I do it still!"

"What?" I cried startled, "does not—"

"Patience. Hear me out. My father was dying of disappointment. I must save him. By incredible exertions, working night and day, I saved about thirty-five dollars in notes. These I exchanged for gold, and one day, when my father was not looking, I cast them into the crucible in which he was making

one of his vain attempts at transmutation. God, I am sure, will pardon the deception. I never anticipated the misery it would lead to.

"I never beheld anything like the joy of my poor father, when, after emptying his crucible, he found a deposit of pure gold at the bottom. He wept, and danced, and sang, and built such castles in the air, that my brain was dizzy to hear him. He gave me the ingot to keep, and went to work at his alchemy with renewed vigor. The same thing occurred. He always found the same quantity of gold in his crucible. I alone knew the secret. He was happy, poor man, for nearly two years, in the belief that he was amassing a fortune. I all the while plied my needle for our daily bread. When he asked me for his savings, the first stroke fell upon me. Then it was that I recognized the folly of my conduct. I could give him no money. I never had any,—while he believed that I had fourteen thousand dollars. My heart was nearly broken when I found that he had conceived the most injurious suspicions against me. Yet I could not blame him. I could give no account of the treasure I had permitted him to believe was in my possession. I must suffer the penalty of my fault, for to undeceive him would be, I felt, to kill him. I remained silent then, and suffered.

"You know the rest. You now know why it was that I was reluctant to give you that ingot,—why it was that I degraded myself so far as to ask it back. It was the only means I had of continuing a deception on which I believed my father's life de-

pended. But that delusion has been dispelled. I can live this life of hypocrisy no longer. I cannot exist, and hear my father, whom I love so, wither me daily with his curses. I will undeceive him this very day. Will you come with me, for I fear the effect on his enfeebled frame?"

"Willingly," I answered, taking her by the hand; "and I think that no absolute danger need be apprehended. Now, Marian," I added, "let me ask forgiveness for having even for a moment wounded so noble a heart. You are truly as great a martyr as any of those whose sufferings the Church perpetuates in altar-pieces."

"I knew you would do me justice when you knew all," she sobbed, pressing my hand; "but come. I am on fire. Let us hasten to my father, and break this terror to him."

When we reached the old alchemist's room, we found him busily engaged over a crucible which was placed on a small furnace, and in which some indescribable mixture was boiling. He looked up as we entered.

"No fear of me, Doctor," he said, with a ghastly smile, "no fear. I must not allow a little physical pain to interrupt my great work, you know. By the way, you are just in time. In a few moments the marriage of the Red King and White Queen will be accomplished, as George Ripley calls the great act, in his book entitled *The Twelve Gates*. Yes, Doctor, in less than ten minutes you will see me make pure, red, shining gold!" And the poor old man

smiled triumphantly, and stirred his foolish mixture with a long rod, which he held with difficulty in his bandaged hands. It was a grievous sight for a man of any feeling to witness.

"Father," said Marian, in a low, broken voice, advancing a little toward the poor old dupe, "I want your forgiveness."

"Ah, hypocrite! for what? Are you going to give me back my gold?"

"No, father, but for the deception that I have been practising on you for two years—"

"I knew it! I knew it!" shouted the old man, with a radiant countenance. "She has concealed my fourteen thousand dollars all this time, and now comes to restore them. I will forgive her. Where are they, Marian?"

"Father,—it must come out. You never made any gold. It was I who saved up thirty-five dollars, and I used to slip them into your crucible when your back was turned,—and I did it only because I saw that you were dying of disappointment. It was wrong, I know,—but, father, I meant well. You'll forgive me, won't you?" And the poor girl advanced a step towards the alchemist.

He grew deathly pale, and staggered as if about to fall. The next instant, though, he recovered himself, and burst into a horrible sardonic laugh. Then he said, in tones full of the bitterest irony, "A conspiracy, is it? Well done, Doctor! You think to reconcile me with this wretched girl by trumping up this story, that I have been for two years a dupe of

her filial piety. It's clumsy, Doctor, and is a total failure. Try again."

"But I assure you, Mr. Blakelock," I said as earnestly as I could, "I believe your daughter's statements to be perfectly true. You will find it to be so, as she has got the ingot in her possession which so often deceived you into the belief that you made gold, and you will certainly find that no transmutation has taken place in your crucible."

"Doctor," said the old man, in tones of the most settled conviction, "you are a fool. That girl has wheedled you. In less than a minute I will turn you out a piece of gold, purer than any the earth produces. Will that convince you?"

"That will convince me," I answered. By a gesture I imposed silence on Marian, who was about to speak. I thought it better to allow the old man to be his own undeceiver,—and we awaited the coming crisis.

The old man, still smiling with anticipated triumph, kept bending eagerly over his crucible, stirring the mixture with his rod, and muttering to himself all the time. "Now," I heard him say, "it changes. There,—there's the scum. And now the green and bronze shades flit across it. O, the beautiful green! the precursor of the golden-red hue, that tells of the end attained! Ah! now the golden-red is coming—slowly—slowly! It deepens, it shines, it is dazzling! Ah, I have it!" So saying, he caught up his crucible in a chemist's tongs, and bore it slowly toward the table on which stood a brass vessel.

"Now, incredulous Doctor!" he cried, "come and be convinced"; and immediately began carefully pouring the contents of the crucible into the brass vessel. When the crucible was quite empty, he turned it up, and called me again. "Come, Doctor, come and be convinced. See for yourself."

"See first if there is any gold in your crucible," I answered, without moving.

He laughed, shook his head derisively, and looked into the crucible. In a moment he grew pale as death.

"Nothing!" he cried. "O, a jest! a jest! There must be gold somewhere. Marian!"

"The gold is here, father," said Marian, drawing the ingot from her pocket; "it is all we ever had."

"Ah!" shrieked the poor old man, as he let the empty crucible fall, and staggered toward the ingot which Marian held out to him. He made three steps, and then fell on his face. Marian rushed toward him, and tried to lift him, but could not. I put her aside gently, and placed my hand on his heart.

"Marian," said I, "it is perhaps better as it is. He is dead!"

MY WIFE'S TEMPER

CHAPTER I

A PREDESTINED MARRIAGE

ELSIE and I were to be married in less than a week. It was rather a strange match, and I knew that some of our neighbors shook their heads over it and said that no good would come. The way it came to pass was thus.

I loved Elsie Burns for two years, during which time she refused me three times. I could no more help asking her to have me, when the chance offered, than I could help breathing or living. To love her seemed natural to me as existence. I felt no shame, only sorrow, when she rejected me; I felt no shame either when I renewed my suit. The neighbors called me mean-spirited to take up with any girl that had refused me as often as Elsie Burns had done; but what cared I about the neighbors? If it is black weather, and the sun is under a cloud every day for a month, is that any reason why the poor farmer should not hope for the blue sky and the plentiful burst of warm light when the dark month is over? I never entirely lost heart. Do not, however, mistake me. I did not mope, and moan, and grow pale, after the manner of poetical lovers. No such thing. I went bravely about my business, ate and drank as usual, laughed when the laugh went round, and slept

soundly, and woke refreshed. Yet all this time I loved—desperately loved—Elsie Burns. I went wherever I hoped to meet her, but did not haunt her with my attention. I behaved to her as any friendly young man would have behaved: I met her and parted from her cheerfully. She was a good girl, too, and behaved well. She had me in her power,—how a woman in Elsie's situation could have mortified a man in mine!—but she never took the slightest advantage of it. She danced with me when I asked her, and had no foolish fears of allowing me to see her home of nights, after a ball was over, or of wandering with me through the pleasant New England fields when the wild-flowers made the paths like roads in fairy-land.

On the several disastrous occasions when I presented my suit I did it simply and manfully, telling her that I loved her very much, and would do everything to make her happy, if she would be my wife. I made no fulsome protestations, and did not once allude to suicide. She, on the other hand, calmly and gravely thanked me for my good opinion, but with the same calm gravity rejected me. I used to tell her that I was grieved; that I would not press her; that I would wait and hope for some change in her feelings. She had an esteem for me, she would say, but could not marry me. I never asked her for any reasons. I hold it to be an insult to a woman of sense to demand her reasons on such an occasion. Enough for me that she did not then wish to be my wife; so the old intercourse went on,—she cordial

and polite as ever, I never for one moment doubting that the day would come when my roof-tree would shelter her, and we should smile together over our fireside at my long and indefatigable wooing.

I will confess that at times I felt a little jealous,—jealous of a man named Hammond Brake, who lived in our village. He was a weird, saturnine fellow who made no friends among the young men of the neighborhood, but who loved to go alone, with his books and his own thoughts for company. He was a studious, and, I believe, a learned young man, and there was no avoiding the fact that he possessed considerable influence over Elsie. She liked to talk with him in corners, or in secluded nooks of the forest, when we all went out blackberry-gathering or picnicking. She read books that he gave her, and whenever a discussion arose relative to any topic higher than those ordinary ones we usually canvassed, Elsie appealed to Brake for his opinion, as a disciple consulting a beloved master. I confess that for a time I feared this man as a rival. A little closer observation, however, convinced me that my suspicions were unfounded. The relation between Elsie and Hammond Brake was purely intellectual. She reverenced his talents and acquirements, but she did not love him. His influence over her, nevertheless, was none the less decided.

In time—as I thought all along—Elsie yielded. I was what was considered a most eligible match, being tolerably rich, and Elsie's parents were most anxious to have me for a son-in-law. I was good-

looking and well-educated enough, and the old people, I believe, pertinaciously dinned all my advantages into my little girl's ears. She battled against the marriage for a long time with a strange persistence,—all the more strange because she never alleged the slightest personal dislike to me; but after a vigorous cannonading from her own garrison, (in which, I am proud to say, I did not in any way join,) she hoisted the white flag and surrendered.

I was very happy. I had no fear about being able to gain Elsie's heart. I think—indeed I know—that she had liked me all along, and that her refusals were dictated by other feelings than those of a personal nature. I only guessed as much then. It was some time before I knew all.

As the day approached for our wedding Elsie did not appear at all stricken with woe. The village gossips had not the smallest opportunity for establishing a romance, with a compulsory bride for the heroine. Yet to me it seemed as if there was something strange about her. A vague terror appeared to beset her. Even in her most loving moments, when resting in my arms, she would shrink away from me, and shudder as if some cold wind had suddenly struck upon her. That it was caused by no aversion to me was evident, for she would the moment after, as if to make amends, give me one of those voluntary kisses that are sweeter than all others.

I reflected over this gravely, as was my custom, but could come to no conclusion. I dismissed it as

one of those mysteries of maidenhood which it is not given to man to fathom.

The day came at length on which we were to be married,—a glorious autumnal day, on which the sweet season of fruits and flowers seemed to have copied the kings of old, and robed itself in its brightest purple and gold, in order to die with becoming splendor. The little village church was nearly filled with the bridal party and the curious crowd who came to see the persevering lover win his bride. Elsie was calm, and grave, and beautiful. The sober beauty of the autumn itself seemed to tinge her face.

Once only did she show any emotion. When the solemn question was put to her, the answer to which was to decide her destiny, I felt her hand—which was in mine—tremble. As she gasped out a convulsive "Yes," she gave one brief, imploring glance at the gallery on the right. I placed the ring upon her finger, and looked in the direction in which she gazed. Hammond Brake's dark countenance was visible looking over the railings, and his eyes were bent sternly on Elsie. I turned quickly round to my bride, but her brief emotion, of whatever nature, had vanished. She was looking at me anxiously, and smiling—somewhat sadly—through her maiden's tears.

I kissed her, and whispered a loving word or two in her ear, at which she brightened; and her grave, decorous old father, and quaint, tender-hearted mother, kissed her, and we rode all alone through glories of the autumn woods to our home.

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE BOOK

THE months went by quickly, and we were very happy. I learned that Elsie really loved me, and of my love for her she had proof long ago. I will not say that there was no cloud upon our little horizon. There was one, but it was so small, and appeared so seldom, that I scarcely feared it. The old vague terror seemed still to attack my wife. If I did not know her to be pure as heaven's snow, I would have said it was a *remorse*. At times she scarcely appeared to hear what I said, so deep would be her revery. Nor did those moods seem pleasant ones. When rapt in such, her sweet features would contract, as if in a hopeless effort to solve some mysterious problem. A sad pain, as it were, quivered in her white, drooped eyelids. One thing I particularly remarked: *she spent hours at a time gazing at the west*. There was a small room in our house whose windows, every evening, flamed with the red light of the setting sun. Here Elsie would sit and gaze westward, so motionless and entranced that it seemed as if her soul was going down with the day. Her conduct to me was curiously varied. She apparently loved me very much, yet there were times when she absolutely avoided me. I have seen her strolling through the fields, and left the house with

the intention of joining her, but the moment she caught sight of me approaching, she has fled into the neighboring copse, with so evident a wish to avoid me that it would have been absolutely cruel to follow.

Once or twice the old jealousy of Hammond Brake crossed my mind, but I was obliged to dismiss it as a frivolous suspicion. Nothing in my wife's conduct justified any such theory. Brake visited us once or twice a week,—in fact, when I returned from my business in the village, I used to find him seated in the parlor with Elsie, reading some favorite author, or conversing on some novel literary topic; but there was no disposition to avoid my scrutiny. Brake seemed to come as a matter of right; and the perfect unconsciousness of furnishing any grounds for suspicion with which he acted was a sufficient answer to my mind for any wild doubts that my heart may have suggested.

Still I could not but remark that Brake's visits were in some manner connected with Elsie's melancholy. On the days when he had appeared and departed the gloom seemed to hang more thickly than ever over her head. She sat, on such occasions, all the evening at the western window, silently gazing at the cleft in the hills through which the sun passed to his repose.

At last I made up my mind to speak to her. It seemed to me to be my duty, if she had a sorrow, to partake of it. I approached her on the matter with the most perfect confidence that I had nothing

to learn beyond the existence of some girlish grief, which a confession and a few loving kisses would exorcise forever.

"Elsie," I said to her one night, as she sat, according to her custom, gazing westward, like those maidens of the old ballads of chivalry watching for the knights that never came,—"Elsie, what is the matter with you, darling? I have noticed a strange melancholy in you for some time past. Tell me all about it."

She turned quickly round and gazed at me with eyes wide open and face filled with a sudden fear. "Why do you ask me that, Mark?" she answered. "I have nothing to tell."

From the strange, startled manner in which this reply was given, I felt convinced that she had something to tell, and instantly formed a determination to discover what it was. A pang shot through my heart as I thought that the woman whom I held dearer than anything on earth hesitated to trust me with a petty secret.

"Elsie," I said, "don't treat me as if I was a grand inquisitor, with racks and thumb-screws in readiness for you if you prove contumacious. You need not look at me in that frightened way. I'm not an ogre, child. I don't breakfast on nice, cosey little women five months married. Supposing you do owe a bill to the milliner, in Boston,—what does it matter? I'm tolerably rich. How much is it?"

I knew perfectly well that she did not owe any

such bill, but it was a mode of testing her. A look of relief passed over her features as I spoke.

"Mark," she said, stroking my hair with her little hand and smiling faintly, "you're a goose. I don't owe any bill to the milliner in Boston, and I have no secret worth knowing. I know I'm a little melancholy at times,—I feel weary; but that is not unnatural, you know, just now, Mark dear,"—kissing me on the lips,—"you must bear with my moods for a little while, until there are *three* of us, and then I'll be better company."

I knew what she alluded to, but, God help me! I felt sad enough at the moment, though I kissed her in return, and ceased to question her. I felt sad, because my instinct told me that she deceived me; and it is very hard to be deceived, even in trifles, by those we love. I left her sitting at her favorite window, and walked out into the fields. I wanted to think.

I remained out until I saw lights in the parlor shining through the dusk evening; then I returned slowly. As I passed the windows,—which were near the ground, our house being cottage-built,—I looked in. Hammond Brake was sitting with my wife. She was sitting in a rocking-chair opposite to him, holding a small volume open on her lap. Brake was talking to her very earnestly, and she was listening to him with an expression I had never before seen on her countenance. Awe, fear, and admiration were all blent together in those dilating eyes. She seemed absorbed, body and soul, in what this man

said. I shuddered at the sight. A vague terror seized me; I hastened into the house. As I entered the room, rather suddenly, my wife started and hastily concealed the little volume that lay on her lap in one of her wide pockets. As she did so, a loose leaf escaped from the volume and slowly fluttered to the floor unobserved by either her or her companion. But I had my eyes upon it. I felt that it was a clew.

"What new novel or philosophical wonder have you both been poring over?" I asked, quite gayly, stealthily watching at the same time the telltale embarrassment under which Elsie was laboring.

Brake, who was not in the least discomposed, replied. "That," said he, "is a secret which must be kept from you. It is an advance copy, and is not to be shown to any one except your wife."

"Ha!" cried I, "I know what it is. It is your volume of poems that Ticknor is publishing. Well, I can wait until it is regularly for sale."

I knew that Brake had a volume in the hands of the publishing house I mentioned, with a vague promise of publication some time in the present century. Hammond smiled significantly, but did not reply. He evidently wished to cultivate this supposed impression of mine. Elsie looked relieved, and heaved a deep sigh. I felt more than ever convinced that a secret was beneath all this. So I drew my chair over the fallen leaf that lay unnoticed on the carpet, and talked and laughed with Hammond Brake gayly, as if nothing was on my mind, while all

the time a great load of suspicion lay heavily at my heart.

At length Hammond Brake rose to go. I wished him good night, but did not offer to accompany him to the door. My wife supplied this omitted courtesy, as I had expected. The moment I was alone I picked up the book-leaf from the floor. It was *not* the leaf of a volume of poems. Beyond that, however, I learned nothing. It contained a string of paragraphs printed in the Biblical fashion, and the language was Biblical in style. It seemed to be a portion of some religious book. Was it possible that my wife was being converted to the Romish faith? Yes, that was it. Brake was a Jesuit in disguise,—I had heard of such things,—and had stolen into the bosom of my family to plant there his destructive errors. There could be no longer any doubt of it. This was some portion of a Romish book;—some infamous Popish publication. Fool that I was not to see it all before! But there was yet time. I would forbid him the house.

I had just formed this resolution when my wife entered. I put the strange leaf in my pocket and took my hat.

"Why, you are not going out, surely?" cried Elsie, surprised.

"I have a headache," I answered. "I will take a short walk."

Elsie looked at me with a peculiar air of distrust. Her woman's instinct told her that there was something wrong. Before she could question me, how-

ever, I had left the room and was walking rapidly on Hammond Brake's track.

He heard the footsteps, and I saw his figure, black against the sky, stop and peer back through the dusk to see who was following him.

"It is I, Brake," I called out. "Stop; I wish to speak with you."

He stopped, and in a minute or so we were walking side by side along the road. My fingers itched at that moment to be on his throat. I commenced the conversation.

"Brake," I said, "I'm a very plain sort of man, and I never say anything without good reason. What I came after you to tell you is, that I don't wish you to come to my house any more, or to speak with Elsie any farther than the ordinary salutations go. It's no joke. I'm quite in earnest."

Brake started, and, stopping short, faced me suddenly in the road. "What have I done?" he asked. "You surely are too sensible a man to be jealous, Dayton."

"O," I answered, scornfully, "not jealous in the ordinary sense of the word, a bit. But I don't think your company good company for my wife, Brake. If you *will* have it out of me, I suspect you of being a Roman Catholic, and of trying to convert my wife."

A smile shot across his face, and I saw his sharp, white teeth gleam for an instant in the dusk.

"Well, what if I am a Papist?" he said, with a strange tone of triumph in his voice. "The faith is

not criminal. Besides, what proof have you that I was attempting to proselyte your wife?"

"This," said I, pulling the leaf from my pocket, —"this leaf from one of those devilish Papist books you and she were reading this evening. I picked it up from the floor. Proof enough, I think!"

In an instant Brake had snatched the leaf from my hand and torn it into atoms.

"You shall be obeyed," he said. "I will not speak with Elsie as long as she is your wife. Good night. So you think I'm a Papist, Dayton? You're a clever fellow!" And with rather a sneering chuckle he marched on along the road and vanished into the darkness.

CHAPTER III

THE SECRET DISCOVERED

BRAKE came no more. I said nothing to Elsie about his prohibition, and his name was never mentioned. It seemed strange to me that she should not speak of his absence, and I was very much puzzled by her silence. Her moodiness seemed to have increased, and, what was most remarkable, in proportion as she grew more and more reserved, the intenser were the bursts of affection which she exhibited for me. She would strain me to her bosom and kiss me, as if she and I were about to be parted forever. Then for hours she would remain sitting at her window, silently gazing, with that terrible, wistful gaze of hers, at the west.

I will confess to having watched my wife at this time. I could not help it. That some mystery hung about her I felt convinced. I must fathom it or die. Her honor I never for a moment doubted; yet there seemed to weigh continually upon me the prophecy of some awful domestic calamity. This time the prophecy was not in vain.

About three weeks after I had forbidden Brake my house, I was strolling over my farm in the evening, apparently inspecting my agriculture, but in reality speculating on that topic which latterly was ever present to me.

There was a little knoll covered with evergreen oaks at the end of the lawn. It was a picturesque spot, for on one side the bank went off into a sheer precipice of about eighty feet in depth, at the bottom of which a pretty pool lay, that in the summer time was fringed with white water-lilies. I had thought of building a summer-house in this spot, and now my steps mechanically directed themselves toward the place. As I approached I heard voices. I stopped and listened eagerly. A few seconds enabled me to ascertain that Hammond Brake and my wife were in the copse talking together. She still followed him, then; and he, scoundrel that he was, had broken his promise. A fury seemed to fill my veins as I made this discovery. I felt the impulse strong upon me to rush into the grove, and then and there strangle the villain who was poisoning my peace. But with a powerful effort I restrained myself. It was necessary that I should overhear what was said. I threw myself flat on the grass, and so glided silently into the copse until I was completely within ear-shot. This was what I heard.

My wife was sobbing. "So soon,—so soon? O Hammond, give me a little time!"

"I cannot, Elsie. My chief orders me to join him. You must prepare to accompany me."

"No, no!" murmured Elsie. "He loves me so! And I love him. Our child, too,—how can I rob him of our unborn babe?"

"Another sheep for our flock," answered Brake, solemnly. "Elsie, do you forget your oath? Are

you one of us or are you a common hypocrite, who will be of us until the hour of self-sacrifice, and then fly like a coward? Elsie, you must leave to-night."

"Ah! my husband, my husband!" sobbed the unhappy woman.

"You have no husband, woman," cried Brake, harshly. "I promised Dayton not to speak to you as long as you were his wife, but the vow was annulled before it was made. Your husband in God yet awaits you. You will yet be blessed with the true spouse."

"I feel as if I were going to die," cried Elsie. "How can I ever forsake him,—he who was so good to me?"

"Nonsense! no weakness. He is not worthy of you. Go home and prepare for your journey. You know where to meet me. I will have everything ready, and by daybreak there shall be no trace of us left. Beware of permitting your husband to suspect anything. He is not very shrewd at such things,—he thought I was a Jesuit in disguise,—but we had better be careful. Now go. You have been too long here already. Bless you, sister."

A few faint sobs, a rustling of leaves, and I knew that Brake was gone. I rose, and stepped silently into the open space in which he stood. His back was toward me. His arms were lifted high over his head with an exultant gesture, and I could see his profile, as it slightly turned toward me, illuminated with a smile of scornful triumph. I put my hand

suddenly on his throat from behind, and flung him on the ground before he could utter a cry.

"Not a word," I said, unclasping a short-bladed knife which I carried; "answer my questions, or, by heaven, I will cut your throat from ear to ear!"

He looked up into my face with an unflinching eye, and set his lips as if resolved to suffer all.

"What are you? Who are you? What object have you in the seduction of my wife?"

He smiled, but was silent.

"Ah! you won't answer. We'll see."

I pressed the knife slowly against his throat. His face contracted spasmodically, but although a thin red thread of blood sprang out along the edge of the blade, Brake remained mute. An idea suddenly seized me. This sort of death had no terrors for him. I would try another. There was the precipice. I was twice as powerful as he was, so I seized him in my arms, and in a moment transported him to the margin of the steep, smooth cliff, the edge of which was garnished with the tough stems of the wild vine. He seemed to feel it was useless to struggle with me, so allowed me passively to roll him over the edge. When he was suspended in the air, I gave him a vine stem to cling to and let him go. He swung at a height of eighty feet, with face upturned and pale. He dared not look down. I seated myself on the edge of the cliff, and with my knife began to cut into the thick vine a foot or two above the place of his grasp. I was correct in my calculation. This terror was too much for him. As he saw the notch in the

vine getting deeper and deeper, his determination gave way.

"I'll answer you," he gasped out, gazing at me with starting eyeballs; "what do you ask?"

"What are you?" was my question, as I ceased cutting at the stem.

"A Mormon," was the answer, uttered with a groan. "Take me up. My hands are slipping. Quick!"

"And you wanted my wife to follow you to that infernal Salt Lake City, I suppose?"

"For God's sake, release me! I'll quit the place, never to come back. Do help me up, Dayton,—I'm falling!"

I felt mightily inclined to let the villain drop; but it did not suit my purpose to be hung for murder, so I swung him back again on the sward, where he fell panting and exhausted.

"Will you quit the place to-night?" I said. "You'd better. By Heaven, if you don't, I'll tell all the men in the village, and we'll lynch you, as sure as your name is Brake."

"I'll go,—I'll go," he groaned. "I swear never to trouble you again."

"You ought to be hanged, you villain. Be off!"

He slunk away through the trees like a beaten dog; and I went home in a state bordering on despair. I found Elsie crying. She was sitting by the window as of old. I knew now why she gazed so constantly at the west. It was her Mecca. Something in my face, I suppose, told her that I was laboring under

great excitement. She rose startled, as soon as I entered the room.

"Elsie," said I, "I am come to take you home."

"Home? Why, I *am* at home, am I not? What do you mean?"

"No. This is no longer your home. You have deceived me. You are a Mormon. I know all. You have become a convert to that apostle of hell, Brigham Young, and you cannot live with me. I love you still, Elsie, dearly; but—you must go and live with your father."

She saw that there was no appeal from my word, and with a face hopeless with despair she arranged her dress and passively went with me.

I live in the same village with my wife, and yet am a widower. She is very penitent, they say; yet I cannot bring myself to believe that one who has allowed the Mormon poison to enter her veins can ever be cured. People say that we shall come together again, but I know better. Mine is not the first hearth that Mormonism has rendered desolate.

WHAT WAS IT?

It is, I confess, with considerable diffidence that I approach the strange narrative which I am about to relate. The events which I purpose detailing are of so extraordinary a character that I am quite prepared to meet with an unusual amount of incredulity and scorn. I accept all such beforehand. I have, I trust, the literary courage to face unbelief. I have, after mature consideration, resolved to narrate, in as simple and straightforward a manner as I can compass, some facts that passed under my observation, in the month of July last, and which, in the annals of the mysteries of physical science, are wholly unparalleled.

I live at No. — Twenty-sixth Street, in New York. The house is in some respects a curious one. It has enjoyed for the last two years the reputation of being haunted. It is a large and stately residence, surrounded by what was once a garden, but which is now only a green enclosure used for bleaching clothes. The dry basin of what has been a fountain, and a few fruit-trees ragged and unpruned, indicate that this spot in past days was a pleasant, shady retreat, filled with fruits and flowers and the sweet murmur of waters.

The house is very spacious. A hall of noble size

leads to a large spiral staircase winding through its centre, while the various apartments are of imposing dimensions. It was built some fifteen or twenty years since by Mr. A.——, the well-known New York merchant, who five years ago threw the commercial world into convulsions by a stupendous bank fraud. Mr. A——, as every one knows, escaped to Europe, and died not long after, of a broken heart. Almost immediately after the news of his decease reached this country and was verified, the report spread in Twenty-sixth Street that No. — was haunted. Legal measures had dispossessed the widow of its former owner, and it was inhabited merely by a care-taker and his wife, placed there by the house-agent in whose hands it had passed for purposes of renting or sale. These people declared that they were troubled with unnatural noises. Doors were opened without any visible agency. The remnants of furniture scattered through the various rooms were, during the night, piled one upon the other by unknown hands. Invisible feet passed up and down the stairs in broad daylight, accompanied by the rustle of unseen silk dresses, and the gliding of viewless hands along the massive balusters. The care-taker and his wife declared they would live there no longer. The house-agent laughed, dismissed them, and put others in their place. The noises and supernatural manifestations continued. The neighborhood caught up the story, and the house remained untenanted for three years. Several persons negotiated for it; but, somehow, always before the bar-

gain was closed they heard the unpleasant rumors and declined to treat any further.

It was in this state of things that my landlady, who at that time kept a boarding-house in Bleecker Street, and who wished to move further up town, conceived the bold idea of renting No. — Twenty-sixth Street. Happening to have in her house rather a plucky and philosophical set of boarders, she laid her scheme before us, stating candidly everything she had heard respecting the ghostly qualities of the establishment to which she wished to remove us. With the exception of two timid persons,—a sea-captain and a returned Californian, who immediately gave notice that they would leave,—all of Mrs. Moffat's guests declared that they would accompany her in her chivalric incursion into the abode of spirits.

Our removal was effected in the month of May, and we were charmed with our new residence. The portion of Twenty-sixth Street where our house is situated, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, is one of the pleasantest localities in New York. The gardens back of the houses, running down nearly to the Hudson, form, in the summer time, a perfect avenue of verdure. The air is pure and invigorating, sweeping, as it does, straight across the river from the Weehawken heights, and even the ragged garden which surrounded the house, although displaying on washing days rather too much clothes-line, still gave us a piece of greensward to look at, and a cool retreat in the summer evenings, where we smoked our cigars in the dusk, and watched the fire-

flies flashing their dark-lanterns in the long grass.

Of course we had no sooner established ourselves at No. — than we began to expect the ghosts. We absolutely awaited their advent with eagerness. Our dinner conversation was supernatural. One of the boarders, who had purchased Mrs. Crowe's "Night Side of Nature" for his own private delectation, was regarded as a public enemy by the entire household for not having bought twenty copies. The man led a life of supreme wretchedness while he was reading this volume. A system of espionage was established, of which he was the victim. If he incautiously laid the book down for an instant and left the room, it was immediately seized and read aloud in secret places to a select few. I found myself a person of immense importance, it having leaked out that I was tolerably well versed in the history of supernaturalism, and had once written a story the foundation of which was a ghost. If a table or a wainscot panel happened to warp when we were assembled in the large drawing-room, there was an instant silence, and every one was prepared for an immediate clanking of chains and a spectral form.

After a month of psychological excitement, it was with the utmost dissatisfaction that we were forced to acknowledge that nothing in the remotest degree approaching the supernatural had manifested itself. Once the black butler asseverated that his candle had been blown out by some invisible agency while he was undressing himself for the night; but as I had more than once discovered this colored gentleman

in a condition when one candle must have appeared to him like two, I thought it possible that, by going a step further in his potations, he might have reversed this phenomenon, and seen no candle at all where he ought to have beheld one.

Things were in this state when an incident took place so awful and inexplicable in its character that my reason fairly reels at the bare memory of the occurrence. It was the tenth of July. After dinner was over I repaired, with my friend Dr. Hammond, to the garden to smoke my evening pipe. Independent of certain mental sympathies which existed between the Doctor and myself, we were linked together by a vice. We both smoked opium. We knew each other's secret, and respected it. We enjoyed together that wonderful expansion of thought, that marvellous intensifying of the perceptive faculties, that boundless feeling of existence when we seem to have points of contact with the whole universe,—in short, that unimaginable spiritual bliss, which I would not surrender for a throne, and which I hope you, reader, will never—never taste.

Those hours of opium happiness which the Doctor and I spent together in secret were regulated with a scientific accuracy. We did not blindly smoke the drug of paradise, and leave our dreams to chance. While smoking, we carefully steered our conversation through the brightest and calmest channels of thought. We talked of the East, and endeavored to recall the magical panorama of its glowing scenery. We criticised the most sensuous poets,—those

who painted life ruddy with health, brimming with passion, happy in the possession of youth and strength. If we talked of Shakespeare's "Tempest," we lingered over Ariel, and avoided Caliban. Like the Guebers, we turned our faces to the east, and saw only the sunny side of the world.

This skilful coloring of our train of thought produced in our subsequent visions a corresponding tone. The splendor of Arabian fairy-land dyed our dreams. We paced that narrow strip of grass with the tread and port of kings. The song of the *rana arborea,* while he clung to the bark of the ragged plum-tree, sounded like the strains of divine musicians. Houses, walls, and streets melted like rain-clouds, and vistas of unimaginable glory stretched away before us. It was a rapturous companionship. We enjoyed the vast delight more perfectly because, even in our most ecstatic moments, we were conscious of each other's presence. Our pleasures, while individual, were still twin, vibrating and moving in musical accord.

On the evening in question, the tenth of July, the Doctor and myself drifted into an unusually metaphysical mood. We lit our large meerschaums, filled with fine Turkish tobacco, in the core of which burned a little black nut of opium, that, like the nut in the fairy tale, held within its narrow limits wonders beyond the reach of kings; we paced to and fro, conversing. A strange perversity dominated the currents of our thought. They would *not* flow through the sun-lit channels into which we strove to divert them. For some unaccountable reason, they

constantly diverged into dark and lonesome beds, where a continual gloom brooded. It was in vain that, after our old fashion, we flung ourselves on the shores of the East, and talked of its gay bazaars, of the splendors of the time of Haroun, of harems and golden palaces. Black afreets continually arose from the depths of our talk, and expanded, like the one the fisherman released from the copper vessel, until they blotted everything bright from our vision. Insensibly, we yielded to the occult force that swayed us, and indulged in gloomy speculation. We had talked some time upon the proneness of the human mind to mysticism, and the almost universal love of the terrible, when Hammond suddenly said to me, "What do you consider to be the greatest element of terror?"

The question puzzled me. That many things were terrible, I knew. Stumbling over a corpse in the dark; beholding, as I once did, a woman floating down a deep and rapid river, with wildly lifted arms, and awful, upturned face, uttering, as she drifted, shrieks that rent one's heart, while we, the spectators, stood frozen at a window which overhung the river at a height of sixty feet, unable to make the slightest effort to save her, but dumbly watching her last supreme agony and her disappearance. A shattered wreck, with no life visible, encountered floating listlessly on the ocean, is a terrible object, for it suggests a huge terror, the proportions of which are veiled. But it now struck me, for the first time, that there must be one great and ruling embodiment

of fear,—a King of Terrors, to which all others must succumb. What might it be? To what train of circumstances would it owe its existence?

"I confess, Hammond," I replied to my friend, "I never considered the subject before. That there must be one Something more terrible than any other thing, I feel. I cannot attempt, however, even the most vague definition."

"I am somewhat like you, Harry," he answered. "I feel my capacity to experience a terror greater than anything yet conceived by the human mind;—something combining in fearful and unnatural amalgamation hitherto supposed incompatible elements. The calling of the voices in Brockden Brown's novel of 'Wieland' is awful; so is the picture of the Dweller of the Threshold, in Bulwer's 'Zanoni'; but," he added, shaking his head gloomily, "there is something more terrible still than these."

"Look here, Hammond," I rejoined, "let us drop this kind of talk, for heaven's sake! We shall suffer for it, depend on it."

"I don't know what's the matter with me to-night," he replied, "but my brain is running upon all sorts of weird and awful thoughts. I feel as if I could write a story like Hoffman, to-night, if I were only master of a literary style."

"Well, if we are going to be Hoffmanesque in our talk, I'm off to bed. Opium and nightmares should never be brought together. How sultry it is! Good-night, Hammond."

"Good-night, Harry. Pleasant dreams to you."

"To you, gloomy wretch, afreets, ghouls, and enchanters."

We parted, and each sought his respective chamber. I undressed quickly and got into bed, taking with me, according to my usual custom, a book, over which I generally read myself to sleep. I opened the volume as soon as I had laid my head upon the pillow, and instantly flung it to the other side of the room. It was Goudon's "History of Monsters,"—a curious French work, which I had lately imported from Paris, but which, in the state of mind I had then reached, was anything but an agreeable companion. I resolved to go to sleep at once; so, turning down my gas until nothing but a little blue point of light glimmered on the top of the tube, I composed myself to rest.

The room was in total darkness. The atom of gas that still remained alight did not illuminate a distance of three inches round the burner. I desperately drew my arms across my eyes, as if to shut out the darkness, and tried to think of nothing. It was in vain. The confounded themes touched on by Hammond in the garden kept obtruding themselves on my brain. I battled against them. I erected ramparts of would-be blankness of intellect to keep them out. They still crowded upon me. While I was lying still as a corpse, hoping that by a perfect physical inaction I should hasten mental repose, an awful incident occurred. A Something dropped, as it seemed, from the ceiling, plum upon my chest, and

the next instant I felt two bony hands encircling my throat, endeavoring to choke me.

I am no coward, and am possessed of considerable physical strength. The suddenness of the attack, instead of stunning me, strung every nerve to its highest tension. My body acted from instinct, before my brain had time to realize the terrors of my position. In an instant I wound two muscular arms around the creature, and squeezed it, with all the strength of despair, against my chest. In a few seconds the bony hands that had fastened on my throat loosened their hold, and I was free to breathe once more. Then commenced a struggle of awful intensity. Immersed in the most profound darkness, totally ignorant of the nature of the Thing by which I was so suddenly attacked, finding my grasp slipping every moment, by reason, it seemed to me, of the entire nakedness of my assailant, bitten with sharp teeth in the shoulder, neck, and chest, having every moment to protect my throat against a pair of sinewy, agile hands, which my utmost efforts could not confine,—these were a combination of circumstances to combat which required all the strength, skill and courage that I possessed.

At last, after a silent, deadly, exhausting struggle, I got my assailant under by a series of incredible efforts of strength. Once pinned, with my knee on what I made out to be its chest, I knew that I was victor. I rested for a moment to breathe. I heard the creature beneath me panting in the darkness, and felt the violent throbbing of a heart. It was ap-

parently as exhausted as I was; that was one comfort. At this moment I remembered that I usually placed under my pillow, before going to bed, a large yellow silk pocket-handkerchief. I felt for it instantly; it was there. In a few seconds more I had, after a fashion, pinioned the creature's arms.

I now felt tolerably secure. There was nothing more to be done but to turn on the gas, and, having first seen what my midnight assailant was like, arouse the household. I will confess to being actuated by a certain pride in not giving the alarm before; I wished to make the capture alone and unaided.

Never losing my hold for an instant, I slipped from the bed to the floor, dragging my captive with me. I had but a few steps to make to reach the gas-burner; these I made with the greatest caution, holding the creature in a grip like a vice. At last I got within arm's-length of the tiny speck of blue light which told me where the gas-burner lay. Quick as lightning I released my grasp with one hand and let on the full flood of light. Then I turned to look at my captive.

I cannot even attempt to give any definition of my sensations the instant after I turned on the gas. I suppose I must have shrieked with terror, for in less than a minute afterward my room was crowded with the inmates of the house. I shudder now as I think of that awful moment. *I saw nothing!* Yes; I had one arm firmly clasped round a breathing, panting, corporeal shape, my other hand gripped with all its strength a throat as warm, and ap-

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parently fleshy, as my own; and yet, with this living substance in my grasp, with its body pressed against my own, and all in the bright glare of a large jet of gas, I absolutely beheld nothing! Not even an outline,—a vapor!

I do not, even at this hour, realize the situation in which I found myself. Imagination in vain tries to compass the awful paradox.

It breathed. I felt its warm breath upon my cheek. It struggled fiercely. It had hands. They clutched me. Its skin was smooth, like my own. There it lay, pressed close up against me, solid as stone,—and yet utterly invisible!

I wonder that I did not faint or go mad on the instant. Some wonderful instinct must have sustained me; for, absolutely, in place of loosening my hold on the terrible Enigma, I seemed to gain an additional strength in my moment of horror, and tightened my grasp with such wonderful force that I felt the creature shivering with agony.

Just then Hammond entered the room at the head of the household. As soon as he beheld my face—which, I suppose, must have been an awful sight to look at—he hastened forward, crying, "Great heaven, Harry! what has happened?"

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried, "come here. O, this is awful! I have been attacked in bed by something or other, which I have hold of; but I can't see it,—I can't see it!"

Hammond, doubtless struck by the unfeigned horror expressed in my countenance, made one or two

steps forward with an anxious yet puzzled expression. A very audible titter burst from the remainder of my visitors. This suppressed laughter made me furious. To laugh at a human being in my position! It was the worst species of cruelty. *Now,* I can understand why the appearance of a man struggling violently, as it would seem, with an airy nothing, and calling for assistance against a vision, should have appeared ludicrous. *Then,* so great was my rage against the mocking crowd that had I the power I would have stricken them dead where they stood.

"Hammond! Hammond!" I cried again, despairingly, "for God's sake come to me. I can hold the —the thing but a short while longer. It is overpowering me. Help me! Help me!"

"Harry," whispered Hammond, approaching me, "you have been smoking too much opium."

"I swear to you, Hammond, that this is no vision," I answered, in the same low tone. "Don't you see how it shakes my whole frame with its struggles? If you don't believe me, convince yourself. Feel it, —touch it."

Hammond advanced and laid his hand in the spot I indicated. A wild cry of horror burst from him. He had felt it!

In a moment he had discovered somewhere in my room a long piece of cord, and was the next instant winding it and knotting it about the body of the unseen being that I clasped in my arms.

"Harry," he said, in a hoarse, agitated voice, for, though he preserved his presence of mind, he was

deeply moved, "Harry, it's all safe now. You may let go, old fellow, if you're tired. The Thing can't move."

I was utterly exhausted, and I gladly loosed my hold.

Hammond stood holding the ends of the cord that bound the Invisible, twisted round his hand, while before him, self-supporting as it were, he beheld a rope laced and interlaced, and stretching tightly around a vacant space. I never saw a man look so thoroughly stricken with awe. Nevertheless his face expressed all the courage and determination which I knew him to possess. His lips, although white, were set firmly, and one could perceive at a glance that, although stricken with fear, he was not daunted.

The confusion that ensued among the guests of the house who were witnesses of this extraordinary scene between Hammond and myself,—who beheld the pantomime of binding this struggling Something, —who beheld me almost sinking from physical exhaustion when my task of jailer was over,—the confusion and terror that took possession of the bystanders, when they saw all this, was beyond description. The weaker ones fled from the apartment. The few who remained clustered near the door and could not be induced to approach Hammond and his Charge. Still incredulity broke out through their terror. They had not the courage to satisfy themselves, and yet they doubted. It was in vain that I begged of some of the men to come near and convince themselves by touch of the existence in

that room of a living being which was invisible. They were incredulous, but did not dare to undeceive themselves. How could a solid, living, breathing body be invisible, they asked. My reply was this. I gave a sign to Hammond, and both of us—conquering our fearful repugnance to touch the invisible creature—lifted it from the ground, manacled as it was, and took it to my bed. Its weight was about that of a boy of fourteen.

"Now, my friends," I said, as Hammond and myself held the creature suspended over the bed, "I can give you self-evident proof that here is a solid, ponderable body, which, nevertheless, you cannot see. Be good enough to watch the surface of the bed attentively."

I was astonished at my own courage in treating this strange event so calmly; but I had recovered from my first terror, and felt a sort of scientific pride in the affair, which dominated every other feeling.

The eyes of the bystanders were immediately fixed on my bed. At a given signal Hammond and I let the creature fall. There was the dull sound of a heavy body alighting on a soft mass. The timbers of the bed creaked. A deep impression marked itself distinctly on the pillow, and on the bed itself. The crowd who witnessed this gave a low cry, and rushed from the room. Hammond and I were left alone with our Mystery.

We remained silent for some time, listening to the low, irregular breathing of the creature on the

bed, and watching the rustle of the bed-clothes as it impotently struggled to free itself from confinement. Then Hammond spoke.

"Harry, this is awful."

"Ay, awful."

"But not unaccountable."

"Not unaccountable! What do you mean? Such a thing has never occurred since the birth of the world. I know not what to think, Hammond. God grant that I am not mad, and that this is not an insane fantasy!"

"Let us reason a little, Harry. Here is a solid body which we touch, but which we cannot see. The fact is so unusual that it strikes us with terror. Is there no parallel, though, for such a phenomenon? Take a piece of pure glass. It is tangible and transparent. A certain chemical coarseness is all that prevents its being so entirely transparent as to be totally invisible. It is not *theoretically impossible,* mind you, to make a glass which shall not reflect a single ray of light,—a glass so pure and homogeneous in its atoms that the rays from the sun will pass through it as they do through the air, refracted but not reflected. We do not see the air, and yet we feel it."

"That's all very well, Hammond, but these are inanimate substances. Glass does not breathe, air does not breathe. This *thing* has a heart that palpitates,—a will that moves it,—lungs that play, and inspire and respire."

"You forget the phenomena of which we have so

often heard of late," answered the Doctor, gravely. "At the meetings called 'spirit circles,' invisible hands have been thrust into the hands of those persons round the table,—warm, fleshy hands that seemed to pulsate with mortal life."

"What? Do you think, then, that this thing is—"

"I don't know what it is," was the solemn reply; "but please the gods I will, with your assistance, thoroughly investigate it."

We watched together, smoking many pipes, all night long, by the bedside of the unearthly being that tossed and panted until it was apparently wearied out. Then we learned by the low, regular breathing that it slept.

The next morning the house was all astir. The boarders congregated on the landing outside my room, and Hammond and myself were lions. We had to answer a thousand questions as to the state of our extraordinary prisoner, for as yet not one person in the house except ourselves could be induced to set foot in the apartment.

The creature was awake. This was evidenced by the convulsive manner in which the bed-clothes were moved in its efforts to escape. There was something truly terrible in beholding, as it were, those second-hand indications of the terrible writhings and agonized struggles for liberty which themselves were invisible.

Hammond and myself had racked our brains during the long night to discover some means by which we might realize the shape and general appearance

of the Enigma. As well as we could make out by passing our hands over the creature's form, its outlines and lineaments were human. There was a mouth; a round, smooth head without hair; a nose, which, however, was little elevated above the cheeks; and its hands and feet felt like those of a boy. At first we thought of placing the being on a smooth surface and tracing its outline with chalk, as shoemakers trace the outline of the foot. This plan was given up as being of no value. Such an outline would give not the slightest idea of its conformation.

A happy thought struck me. We could take a cast of it in plaster of Paris. This would give us the solid figure, and satisfy all our wishes. But how to do it? The movements of the creature would disturb the setting of the plastic covering, and distort the mould. Another thought. Why not give it chloroform? It had respiratory organs,—that was evident by its breathing. Once reduced to a state of insensibility, we could do with it what we would. Doctor X—— was sent for; and after the worthy physician had recovered from the first shock of amazement, he proceeded to administer the chloroform. In three minutes afterward we were enabled to remove the fetters from the creature's body, and a modeller was busily engaged in covering the invisible form with the moist clay. In five minutes more we had a mould, and before evening a rough fac-simile of the Mystery. It was shaped like a man,—distorted, uncouth, and horrible, but still a man. It was small, not over four feet and some

inches in height, and its limbs revealed a muscular development that was unparalleled. Its face surpassed in hideousness anything I had ever seen. Gustave Doré, or Callot, or Tony Johannot, never conceived anything so horrible. There is a face in one of the latter's illustrations to *Un Voyage où il vous plaira,* which somewhat approaches the countenance of this creature, but does not equal it. It was the physiognomy of what I should fancy a ghoul might be. It looked as if it was capable of feeding on human flesh.

Having satisfied our curiosity, and bound every one in the house to secrecy, it became a question what was to be done with our Enigma? It was impossible that we should keep such a horror in our house; it was equally impossible that such an awful being should be let loose upon the world. I confess that I would have gladly voted for the creature's destruction. But who would shoulder the responsibility? Who would undertake the execution of this horrible semblance of a human being? Day after day this question was deliberated gravely. The boarders all left the house. Mrs. Moffat was in despair, and threatened Hammond and myself with all sorts of legal penalties if we did not remove the Horror. Our answer was, "We will go if you like, but we decline taking this creature with us. Remove it yourself if you please. It appeared in your house. On you the responsibility rests." To this there was, of course, no answer. Mrs. Moffat could not obtain

for love or money a person who would even approach the Mystery.

The most singular part of the affair was that we were entirely ignorant of what the creature habitually fed on. Everything in the way of nutriment that we could think of was placed before it, but was never touched. It was awful to stand by, day after day, and see the clothes toss, and hear the hard breathing, and know that it was starving.

Ten, twelve days, a fortnight passed, and it still lived. The pulsations of the heart, however, were daily growing fainter, and had now nearly ceased. It was evident that the creature was dying for want of sustenance. While this terrible life-struggle was going on, I felt miserable. I could not sleep. Horrible as the creature was, it was pitiful to think of the pangs it was suffering.

At last it died. Hammond and I found it cold and stiff one morning in the bed. The heart had ceased to beat, the lungs to inspire. We hastened to bury it in the garden. It was a strange funeral, the dropping of that viewless corpse into the damp hole. The cast of its form I gave to Doctor X——, who keeps it in his museum in Tenth Street.

As I am on the eve of a long journey from which I may not return, I have drawn up this narrative of an event the most singular that has ever come to my knowledge.

THE DRAGON FANG POSSESSED BY THE CONJURER PIOU-LU

CHAPTER I

THE MIRACULOUS DRAGON FANG

"COME, men and women, and little people of Tching-tou, come and listen. The small and ignoble person who annoys you by his presence is the miserable conjurer known as Piou-Lu. Everything that can possibly be desired he can give you;—charms to heal dissensions in your noble and illustrious families;—spells by which beautiful little people without style may become learned Bachelors, and reign high in the palaces of literary composition;—Supernatural red pills, with which you can cure your elegant and renowned diseases;—wonderful incantations, by which the assassins of any member of your shining and virtuous families can be discovered and made to yield compensation, or be brought under the just eye of the Brother of the Sun. What is it that you want? This mean little conjurer, who now addresses you, can supply all your charming and refreshing desires; for he is known everywhere as Piou-Lu, the possessor of the ever-renowned and miraculous Dragon Fang!"

There was a little, dry laugh, and a murmur among the crowd of idlers that surrounded the stage erected by Piou-Lu in front of the Hotel of the

Thirty-two Virtues. Fifth-class Mandarins looked at fourth-class Mandarins and smiled, as much as to say, "We who are educated men know what to think of this fellow." But the fourth-class Mandarins looked haughtily at the fifth-class, as if they had no business to smile at their superiors. The crowd, however, composed as it was principally of small traders, barbers, porcelain-tinkers, and country people, gazed with open mouths upon the conjurer, who, clad in a radiant garment of many colors, strutted proudly up and down upon his temporary stage.

"What is a Dragon Fang, ingenious and well-educated conjurer?" at last inquired Wei-chang-tze, a solemn-looking Mandarin of the third class, who was adorned with a sapphire button, and a one-eyed peacock's feather. "What is a Dragon Fang?"

"Is it possible," asked Piou-Lu, "that the wise and illustrious son of virtue, the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, does not know what a Dragon Fang is?" and the conjurer pricked up his ears at the Mandarin, as a hare at a barking dog.

"Of course, of course," said the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, looking rather ashamed of his having betrayed such ignorance, "one does not pass his examinations for nothing. I merely wished that you should explain to those ignorant people here what a Dragon Fang is; that was why I asked."

"I thought that the Soul of Wisdom must have known," said Piou-Lu, triumphantly, looking as if he believed firmly in the knowledge of Wei-chang-tze.

"The noble commands of Wei-chang-tze shall be obeyed. You all know," said he, looking round upon the people, "that there are three great and powerful Dragons inhabiting the universe. Lung, or the Dragon of the Sky; Li, or the Dragon of the Sea; and Kiau, or the Dragon of the Marshes. All these Dragons are wise, strong, and terrible. They are wondrously formed, and can take any shape that pleases them. Well, good people, a great many moons ago, in the season of spiked grain, I was following the profession of a barber in the mean and unmentionable town of Siho, when one morning, as I was sitting in my shop waiting for customers, I heard a great noise of tam-tams, and a princely palanquin stopped before my door. I hastened, of course to observe the honorable Rites toward this new-comer, but before I could reach the street a Mandarin, splendidly attired, descended from the palanquin. The ball on his cap was of a stone and color that I had never seen before, and three feathers of some unknown bird hung down behind his head-dress. He held his hand to his jaw, and walked into my house with a lordly step. I was greatly confused, for I knew not what rank he was of, and felt puzzled how to address him. He put an end to my embarrassment.

" 'I am in the house of Piou-Lu, the barber,' he said, in a haughty voice that sounded like the roll of a copper drum amidst the hills.

" 'That disgraceful and ill-conditioned person

stands before you,' I replied, bowing as low as I could.

" 'It is well,' said he, seating himself in my operating-chair, while two of his attendants fanned him. 'Piou-Lu, I have the toothache!'

" 'Does your lordship,' said I, 'wish that I should remove your noble and illustrious pain?'

" 'You must draw my tooth,' said he. 'Woe to you if you draw the wrong one!'

" 'It is too much honor,' I replied; 'but I will make my abominable and ill-conducted instruments entice your lordship's beautiful tooth out of your high-born jaw with much rapidity.'

"So I got my big pincers, and my opium-bottle, and opened the strange Mandarin's mouth. Ah! it was then that my low-born and despicable heart descended into my bowels. I should have dropped my pincers from sheer fright if they had not caught by their hooked ends in my wide sleeve. The Mandarin's mouth was all on fire inside. As he breathed, the flames rolled up and down his throat, like the flames that gather on the Yellow Grass Plains in the season of Much Heat. His palate glowed like red-hot copper, and his tongue was like a brass stewpan that had been on the salt-fire for thirty days. But it was his teeth that affrighted me most. They were a serpent's teeth. They were long, and curved inward, and seemed to be made of transparent crystal, in the centre of which small tongues of orange-colored fire leaped up and down out of some cavity in the gums.

" 'Well, dilatory barber,' said the Mandarin, in a horrible tone, while I stood pale and trembling before him, 'why don't you draw my tooth? Hasten, or I will have you sliced lengthwise and fried in the sun.'

" 'O, my lord!' said I, terrified at this threat, 'I fear that my vicious and unendurable pincers are not sufficiently strong.'

" 'Slave!' answered he in a voice of thunder, 'if you do not fulfill my desires, you will not see another moon rise.'

"I saw that I should be killed any way, so I might as well make the attempt. I made a dart with my pincers at the first tooth that came, closed them firmly on the crystal fang, and began to pull with all my strength. The Mandarin bellowed like an ox of Thibet. The flames rolled from his throat in such volumes that I thought they would singe my eyebrows. His two attendants and his four palanquin-bearers put their arms round my waist to help me to pull, and there we tugged for three or four minutes, until at last I heard a report as loud as nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine firecrackers. The attendants, the palanquin-bearers, and myself all fell flat on the floor, and the crystal fang glittered between the jaws of the pincers.

"The Mandarin was smiling pleasantly as I got up from the floor. 'Piou-Lu,' said he, 'you had a narrow escape. You have removed my toothache, but had you failed, you would have perished miserably; for I am the Dragon Lung, who rules the sky

and the heavenly bodies, and I am as powerful as I am wise. Take as a reward the Dragon Fang which you drew from my jaw. You will find it a magical charm with which you can work miracles. Honor your parents, observe the Rites, and live in peace.'

"So saying, he breathed a whole cloud of fire and smoke from his throat, that filled my poor and despicable mansion. The light dazzled and the smoke suffocated me, and when I recovered my sight and breath the Dragon Lung, the attendants, the palanquin, and the four bearers had all departed, how and whither I knew not. Thus was it, elegant and refined people of Tching-tou, that this small and evil-minded person who stands before you became possessed of the wonderful Dragon Fang, with which he can work miracles."

This story, delivered as it was with much graceful and dramatic gesticulation, and a volubility that seemed almost supernatural, had its effect upon the crowd, and a poor little tailor, named Hang-pou, who was known to be always in debt, was heard to say that he wished he had the Dragon Fang, wherewith to work miracles with his creditors. But the Mandarins, blue, crystal, and gilt, smiled contemptuously, and said to themselves, "We who are learned men know how to esteem these things."

The Mandarin Wei-chang-tze, however, seemed to be of an inquiring disposition, and evinced a desire to continue his investigations.

"Supremely visited conjurer," said he to Piou-Lu, "your story is indeed wonderful. To have been

visited by the Dragon Lung must have been truly refreshing and enchanting. Though not in the least doubting your marvellous relation, I am sure this virtuous assemblage would like to see some proof of the miraculous power of your Dragon Fang."

The crowd gave an immediate assent to this sentiment by pressing closer to the platform on which Piou-Lu strutted, and exclaiming with one voice, "The lofty Mandarin says wisely. We would like to behold."

Piou-Lu did not seem in the slightest degree disconcerted. His narrow black eyes glistened like the dark edges of the seeds of the water-melon, and he looked haughtily around him.

"Is there any one of you who would like to have a miracle performed, and of what nature?" he asked, with a triumphant wave of his arms.

"I would like to see my debts paid," murmured the little tailor, Hang-pou.

"O Hang-pou," replied the conjurer, "this unworthy personage is not going to pay your debts. Go home and sit in your shop, and drink no more rice-wine, and your debts will be paid; for labor is the Dragon Fang that works miracles for idle tailors!"

There was a laugh through the crowd at this sally, because Hang-pou was well known to be fond of intoxicating drinks, and spent more of his time in the street than on his shop-board.

"Would either of you like to be changed into a

camel?" continued Piou-Lu. "Say the word, and there shall not be a finer beast in all Thibet!"

No one, however, seemed to be particularly anxious to experience this transformation. Perhaps it was because it was warm weather, and camels bear heavy burdens.

"I will change the whole honorable assemblage into turkey-buzzards, if it only agrees," continued the conjurer; "or I will make the Lake Tung come up into the town in the shape of a water-melon, and then burst and overflow everything."

"But we should all be drowned!" exclaimed Hang-pou, who was cowardly as well as intemperate.

"That's true," said Piou-Lu, "but then you need not fear your creditors,"—and he gave such a dart of his long arm at the poor little tailor, that the wretched man thought he was going to claw him up and change him into some frightful animal.

"Well, since this illustrious assembly will not have turkey-buzzards or camels, this weak-minded, ill-shapen personage must work a miracle on himself," said Piou-Lu, descending from his platform into the street, and bringing with him a little three-legged stool made of bamboo rods.

The crowd retreated as he approached, and even the solemn Wei-chang-tze seemed rather afraid of this miraculous conjurer. Piou-Lu placed the bamboo stool firmly on the ground, and then mounted upon it.

"Elegant and symmetrical bamboo stool," he said, lifting his arms, and exhibiting something in his

hand that seemed like a piece of polished jade-stone, —"elegant and symmetrical bamboo stool, the justly despised conjurer, named Piou-Lu, entreats that you will immediately grow tall, in the name of the Dragon Lung!"

Truly the stool began to grow, in the presence of the astonished crowd. The three legs of bamboo lengthened and lengthened with great rapidity, bearing Piou-Lu high up into the air. As he ascended he bowed gracefully to the open-mouthed assembly.

"It is delightful!" he cried; "the air up here is so fresh! I smell the tea-winds from Fuh-kien. I can see the spot where the heavens and the earth cease to run parallel. I hear the gongs of Pekin, and listen to the lowing of the herds in Thibet. Who would not have an elegant bamboo stool that knew how to grow?"

By this time Piou-Lu had risen to an enormous height. The legs of the slender tripod on which he was mounted seemed like silkworm's threads, so thin were they compared with their length. The crowd began to tremble for Piou-Lu.

"Will he never stop?" said a Mandarin with a gilt ball, named Lin.

"O, yes!" shouted Piou-Lu from the dizzy height of his bamboo stool. "O, yes! this ugly little person will immediately stop. Elegant stool, the poor conjurer entreats you to stop growing; but he also begs that you will afford some satisfaction to this beautifying assemblage down below, who have honored you with their inspection."

The bamboo stool, with the utmost complaisance, ceased to lengthen out its attenuated limbs, but on the moment experienced another change as terrifying to the crowd. The three legs began to approach each other rapidly, and before the eye could very well follow their motions had blended mysteriously and inexplicably into one, the stool still retaining a miraculous equilibrium. Immediately this single stem began to thicken most marvellously, and instead of the dark shining skin of a bamboo stick, it seemed gradually to be incased in overlapping rings of a rough bark. Meanwhile a faint rustling noise continued overhead, and when the crowd, attracted by the sound, looked up, instead of the flat disk of canework on which Piou-Lu had so wondrously ascended, they beheld a cabbage-shaped mass of green, which shot forth every moment long pointed satiny leaves of the tenderest green, and the most graceful shape imaginable. But where was Piou-Lu? Some fancied that in the yellow crown that topped the cabbage-shaped bud of this strange tree they could see the tip of his cap, and distinguish his black, roguish eyes, but that may have been all fancy; and they were quickly diverted from their search for the conjurer by a shower of red, pulpy fruits, that began to fall with great rapidity from the miraculous tree. Of course there was a scramble, in which the Mandarins themselves did not disdain to join; and the crimson fruits—the like of which no one in Tching-tou had ever seen before—proved delightfully sweet and palatable to the taste.

"That's right! that's right! perfectly bred and very polite people," cried a shrill voice while they were all scrambling for the crimson fruits; "pick fruit while it is fresh, and tea while it is tender. For the sun wilts, and the chills toughen, and the bluest plum blooms only for a day."

Everybody looked up, and lo! there was Piou-Lu, as large as life, strutting upon the stage, waving a large green fan in his hand. While the crowd was yet considering this wonderful reappearance of the conjurer, there was heard a very great outcry at the end of the street, and a tall thin man in a coarse blue gown came running up at full speed.

"Where are my plums, sons of thieves?" he cried, almost breathless with haste. "Alas! alas! I am completely ruined. My wife will perish miserably for want of food, and my sons will inherit nothing but empty baskets at my death! Where are my plums?"

"Who is it that dares to address the virtuous and well-disposed people of Tching-tou after this fashion?" demanded the Mandarin Lin, in a haughty voice, as he confronted the new-comer.

The poor man, seeing the gilt ball, became immediately very humble, and bowed several times to the Mandarin.

"O, my lord!" said he, "I am an incapable and undeserving plum-seller, named Liho. I was just now sitting at my stall in a neighboring street selling five cash worth of plums to a customer, when suddenly all the plums rose out of my baskets as if they

had the wings of hawks, and flew through the air over the tops of the houses in this direction. Thinking myself the sport of demons, I ran after them, hoping to catch them, and— Ah! there are my plums," he cried, suddenly interrupting himself and making a dart at some of the crimson fruits that the tailor Hang held in his hand, intending to carry them home to his wife.

"These your plums!" screamed Hang, defending his treasure vigorously. "Mole that you are, did you ever see scarlet plums?"

"This man is stricken by Heaven," said Piou-Lu, gravely. "He is a fool who hides his plums and then thinks that they fly away. Let some one shake his gown."

A porcelain-cobbler who stood near the fruiterer immediately seized the long blue robe and gave it a lusty pull, when, to the wonder of everybody, thousands of the most beautiful plums fell out, as from a tree shaken by the winds of autumn. At this moment a great gust of wind arose in the street, and a pillar of dust mounted up to the very top of the strange tree, that still stood waving its long satiny leaves languidly above the house-tops. For an instant every one was blinded, and when the dust had subsided so as to permit the people to use their eyes again the wonderful tree had completely vanished, and all that could be seen was a little bamboo stool flying along the road, where it was blown by the storm. The poor fruiterer, Liho, stood aghast, looking at the plums, in which he stood knee-deep.

The Mandarin, addressing him, said sternly, "Let us hear no more such folly from Liho, otherwise he will get twenty strokes of the stick."

"Gather your plums, Liho," said Piou-Lu kindly, "and think this one of your fortunate days; for he who runs after his losses with open mouth does not always overtake them."

And as the conjurer descended from his platform it did not escape the sharp eyes of the little tailor Hang that Piou-Lu exchanged a mysterious signal with the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW OF THE DUCK

It was close on nightfall when Piou-Lu stopped before Wei-chang-tze's house. The lanterns were already lit, and the porter dozed in a bamboo chair so soundly, that Piou-Lou entered the porch and passed the screen without awaking him. The inner room was dimly lighted by some horn lanterns elegantly painted with hunting scenes; but despite the obscurity the conjurer could discover Wei-chang-tze seated at the farther end of the apartment on an inclined couch covered with blue and yellow satin. Along the corridor that led to the women's apartments the shadows lay thick; but Piou-Lou fancied he could hear the pattering of little feet upon the matted floor, and see the twinkle of curious eyes illuminating the solemn darkness. Yet, after all, he may have been mistaken, for the corridor opened on a garden wealthy in the rarest flowers, and he may have conceived the silver dripping of the fountain to be pattering of dainty feet, and have mistaken the moonlight shining on the moist leaves of the lotus for the sparkle of women's eyes.

"Has Piou-Lu arrived in my dwelling?" asked Wei-chang-tze from the dim corner in which he lay.

"That ignoble and wrath-deserving personage bows his head before you," answered Piou-Lu, ad-

vancing and saluting the Mandarin in accordance with the laws of the Book of Rites.

"I hope that you performed your journey hither in great safety and peace of mind," said Wei-chang-tze, gracefully motioning to the conjurer to seat himself on a small blue sofa that stood at a little distance.

"When so mean an individual as Piou-Lu is honored by the request of the noble Wei-chang-tze, good fortune must attend him. How could it be otherwise?" replied Piou-Lu, seating himself not on the small blue sofa, but on the satin one which was partly occupied by the Mandarin himself.

"Piou-Lu did not send in his name, as the Rites direct," said Wei-chang-tze, looking rather disgusted by this impertinent freedom on the part of the conjurer.

"The elegant porter that adorns the noble porch of Wei-chang-tze was fast asleep," answered Piou-Lu, "and Piou-Lu knew that the great Mandarin expected him with impatience."

"Yes," said Wei-chang-tze; "I am oppressed by a thousand demons; devils sleep in my hair, and my ears are overflowing with evil spirits; I cannot rest at night, and feel no pleasure in the day. Therefore was it that I wished to see you, in hopes that you would, by amusing the demon that inhabits my stomach, induce him to depart."

"I will endeavor to delight the respectable demon who lodges in your stomach with my unworthy con-

jurations," replied Piou-Lou. "But first I must go into the garden to gather flowers."

"Go," said Wei-chang-tze. "The moon shines, and you will see there very many rare and beautiful plants that are beloved by my daughter Wu."

"The moonlight itself cannot shine brighter on the lilies than the glances of your lordship's daughter," said the conjurer, bowing and proceeding to the garden.

Ah! what a garden it was that Piou-Lu now entered! The walls that surrounded it were lofty, and built of a rosy stone brought from the mountains of Mantchouria. This wall, on whose inner face flowery designs and triumphal processions were sculptured at regular intervals, sustained the long and richly laden shoots of the white magnolia, which spread its large snowy chalices in myriads over the surface. Tamarisks and palms sprang up in various parts of the grounds, like dark columns supporting the silvery sky; while the tender and mournful willow drooped its delicate limbs over numberless fish-ponds, whose waters seemed to repose peacefully in the bosom of the emerald turf. The air was distracted with innumerable perfumes, each more fragrant than the other. The blue convolvulus, the crimson ipomea, the prodigal azaleas, the spotted tiger-liles, the timid and half-hidden jasmine, all poured forth, during the day and night, streams of perfume from the inexhaustible fountains of their chalices. The heavy odors of the tube-rose floated languidly through the leaves, as a richly-plumaged bird would

float through summer air, borne down by his own splendor. The blue lotus slept on the smooth waves of the fish-ponds in sublime repose. There seemed an odor of enchantment over the entire place. The flowers whispered their secrets in the perfumed silence; the inmost heart of every blossom was unclosed at that mystic hour; all the magic and mystery of plants floated abroad, and the garden seemed filled with the breath of a thousand spells. But amidst the lilies and lotuses, amidst the scented roses and the drooping convolvuli, there moved a flower fairer than all.

"I am here," whispered a low voice, and a dusky figure came gliding toward Piou-Lu, as he stood by the fountain.

"Ah!" said the conjurer, in a tender tone, far different from the shrill one in which he addressed the crowd opposite the Hotel of the Thirty-two Virtues. "The garden is now complete. Wu, the Rose of Completed Beauty, has blossomed on the night."

"Let Piou-Lu shelter her under his mantle from the cold winds of evening, and bear her company for a little while, for she has grown up under a lonely wall," said Wu, laying her little hand gently on the conjurer's arm, and nestling up to his side as a bird nestles into the fallen leaves warmed by the sun.

"She can lie there but a little while," answered Piou-Lu, folding the Mandarin's daughter in a passionate embrace, "for Wei-chang-tze awaits the coming of Piou-Lu impatiently, in order to have a con-

juration with a devil that inhabits his stomach."

"Alas!" said Wu, sadly, "why do you not seek some other and more distinguished employment than that of a conjurer? Why do you not seek distinction in the Palace of Literary Composition, and obtain a style? Then we need not meet in secret, and you might without fear demand my hand from my father."

Piou-Lu smiled, almost scornfully. He seemed to gain an inch in stature, and looked around him with an air of command.

"The marble from which the statue is to be carved must lie in the quarry until the workman finds it," he answered, "and the hour of my destiny has not yet arrived."

"Well, we must wait, I suppose," said Wu, with a sigh. "Meantime, Piou-Lu, I love you."

"The hour will come sooner than you think," said Piou-Lu, returning her caress; "and now go, for the Mandarin waits."

Wu glided away through the gloom to her own apartment, while the conjurer passed rapidly through the garden and gathered the blossoms of certain flowers as he went. He seemed to linger with a strange delight over the buds bathed in the moonlight and the dew; their perfume ascended into his nostrils like incense, and he breathed it with a voluptuous pleasure.

"Now let the demon tremble in the noble stomach of Wei-chang-tze," said Piou-Lu, as he re-entered the hall of reception laden with flowers. "This ill-

favored personage will make such conjurations as shall delight the soul of the elegant and well-born Mandarin, and cause his illustrious persecutor to fly terrified."

Piou-Lu then stripped off the petals from many of the flowers, and gathered them in a heap on the floor. The mass of leaves were indeed variegated. The red of the quamoclit, the blue of the convolvulus, the tender pink of the camellia, the waxen white of the magnolia, were all mingled together like the thousand hues in the Scarfs of Felicity. Having built this confused mass of petals in the shape of a pyramid, Piou-Lu unwound a scarf from his waist and flung it over the heap. He then drew the piece of jade-stone from his pocket, and said,—

"This personage of outrageous presence desires that what will be may be shown to the lofty Mandarin, Wei-chang-tze."

As he pronounced these words, he twitched the scarf away with a rapid jerk, and lo! the flower-leaves were gone, and in their place stood a beautiful mandarin duck, in whose gorgeous plumage one might trace the brilliant hues of the flowers. Piou-Lu now approached the duck, caught it up with one hand, while with the other he drew a sharp knife from his girdle and severed the bird's head from its body at a single stroke. To the great astonishment of Wei-chang-tze, the body and dismembered head of the bird vanished the moment the knife had passed through the neck; but at the same instant a duck, resembling it in every respect, escaped from the

conjurer's hands and flew across the room. When I say that this duck resembled the other in every respect, I mean only in shape, size, and colors. For the rest, it was no bodily duck. It was impalpable and transparent, and even when it flew it made no noise with its wings.

"This is indeed wonderful!" said Wei-chang-tze. "Let the marvellous conjurer explain."

"The duck formed out of flowers was a duck pure in body and in spirit, most lofty Mandarin," said Piou-Lu, "and when it died under the knife, I ordered its soul to pass into its shadow, which can never be killed. Hence the shadow of the duck has all the colors as well as the intelligence of the real duck that gave it birth."

"And to what end has the very wise Piou-Lu created this beautiful duck-shadow?" asked the Mandarin.

"The cultivated Wei-chang-tze shall immediately behold," answered the conjurer, drawing from his wide sleeve a piece of rock-salt and flinging it to the farther end of the room. He had hardly done this when a terrific sound, between a bark and a howl, issued from the dim corner into which he had cast the rock-salt, and immediately a large gray wolf issued wonderfully from out of the twilight, and rushed with savage fangs upon the shadow of the beautiful duck.

"Why, it is a wolf from the forest of Mantchouria!" exclaimed Wei-chang-tze, rather alarmed

at this frightful apparition. "This is no shadow, but a living and blood-thirsty beast."

"Let my lord observe and have no fear," said Piou-Lu, tranquilly.

The wolf seemed rather confounded when, on making a snap at the beautiful duck, his sharp fangs met no resistance, while the bird flew with wonderful venom straight at his fiery eyes. He growled, and snapped, and tore with his claws at the agile shadow that fluttered around and over him, but all to no purpose. As well might the hound leap at the reflection of the deer in the pool where he drinks. The shadow of the beautiful duck seemed all the while to possess some strange, deadly influence over the savage wolf. His growls grew fainter and fainter, and his red and flaming eyes seemed to drop blood. His limbs quivered all over, and the rough hairs of his coat stood on end with terror and pain, —the shadow of the beautiful duck never ceasing all the time to fly straight at his eyes.

"The wolf is dying!" exclaimed Wei-chang-tze.

"He will die,—die like a dog," said Piou-Lu, in a tone of savage triumph.

And presently, as he predicted, the wolf gave two or three faint howls, turned himself round in a circle as if making a bed to sleep on, and then lay down and died. The shadow of the beautiful duck seemed now to be radiant with glory. It shook its bright wings, that were lovely and transparent as a rainbow, and, mounting on the dead body of the wolf, sat in majesty upon his grim and shaggy throne.

"And what means this strange exhibition, learned and wise conjurer?" asked Wei-chang-tze, with a sorely troubled air.

"I will tell you," said Piou-Lu, suddenly dropping his respectful and ceremonious language, and lifting his hand with an air of supreme power. "The mandarin duck, elegant, faithful, and courageous, is an emblem of the dynasty of Ming, the true Chinese race that ruled so splendidly in this land before the invaders usurped the throne. The cowardly and savage wolf is a symbol of the Mantchou Tartar robbers who slew our liberties, shaved our heads, and enchained our people. The time has now arrived when the duck has recovered its splendor and its courage, and is going to kill the wolf; for the wolf cannot bite it, as it works like a shadow in the twilight and mystery of secret association. This you know, Wei-chang-tze, as well as I."

"I have indeed heard of a rebel Chinese named Tién-té who has raised a flame in our peaceful land, and who, proclaiming himself a lineal descendant of the dynasty of Ming, seeks to dethrone our wise and heavenly sovereign, Hién-foung."

"Lie not to me, Wei-chang-tze, for I know your inmost thoughts. Chinese as you are, I know that you hate the Tartar in your heart, but you are afraid to say so for fear of losing your head."

The Mandarin was so stupefied at this audacious address that he could not reply, while the conjurer continued: "I come to make you an offer. Join the forces of the heaven-descended Emperor Tién-té.

Join with him in expelling this tyrannical Tartar race from the Central Kingdom, and driving them back again to their cold hills and barren deserts. Fly with me to the Imperial camp, and bring with you your daughter Wu, the Golden Heart of the Lily, and I promise you the command of one third of the Imperial forces, and the Presidency of the College of Ceremonies."

"And who are you, who dare to ask of Wei-chang-tze to bestow on you his nobly-born daughter?" said Wei-chang-tze, starting in a rage from his couch.

"I!" replied Piou-Lu, shaking his conjurer's gown from his shoulders and displaying a splendid garment of yellow satin, on the breast of which was emblazoned the Imperial Dragon,—"I am your Emperor, Tién-té?"

"Ha!" screamed a shrill voice behind him at this moment, "here he is. The elegant and noble rebel for whose head our worthy Emperor has offered a reward of ten thousand silver tales. Here he is. Catch! beautiful and noble Mandarins, catch him! and I will pay my creditors with the head money."

Piou-Lu turned, and beheld the little tailor Hang-pou, at whose back were a whole file of soldiers and a number of Mandarins. Wei-chang-tze shuddered, for in this compromise of his character he knew that his death was written if he fell into the Imperial hands.

CHAPTER III

"ALL IS OVER"

"STATELY and temperate tailor," said Piou-Lu, calmly, "why do you wish to arrest me?"

"Ho! because I will get a reward, and I want to pay my debts," said Hang-pou, grinning spitefully.

"A reward for me, the miserable and marrowless conjurer Piou-Lu! O, elegant cutter of summer gowns, your well-educated brains are not at home!"

"O, we know you well enough, mighty conjurer. You are none other than the contumacious rebel, Tién-té, who dares to claim the throne held by the wise and merciful Hién Foung; and we will bear you to the court of Pekin in chains, so that you may wither in the light of his terrible eyes."

"You think you will get a reward of ten thousand silver tales for my head?" said Piou-Lu.

"Certainly," replied the little tailor, rubbing his hands with glee,—"certainly. His Unmatched and Isolated Majesty has promised it, and the Brother of the Sun never lies."

"Listen, inventive closer of symmetrical seams! Listen, and I will tell you what will become of your ten thousand silver tales. There is a long avenue leading to the Imperial treasury, and at every second step is an open hand. When the ten thousand tales are poured out, the first hand grasps a half, the sec-

ond hand an eighth of the remaining half, the third hand grasps a fourth of the rest, and when the money-bags get down a little lower, all the hands grasp together; so that when the bags reach the little tailor Hang-pou, who stands stamping his feet very far down indeed, they are entirely empty; for Tartar robbers surround the throne, and a Tartar usurper sits upon it, and the great Chinese nation toils in its rice-fields to gild their palaces, and fill their seraglios, and for all they give get neither justice nor mercy. But I, Tién-té, the Heavenly Emperor of this Central Land, will ordain it otherwise, and hurl the false Dragon from his throne; for it is written in the Book of Prognostics, a copy of which was brought to me on the wings of a yellow serpent, that the dynasty of Han shall rule once more, and the Tartar wolves perish miserably out of the Land of Flowers."

"This is treason against the Light of the Universe, our most gracious Emperor," said the Mandarin Lin. "You shall have seventy times seven pounds of cold iron put upon your neck for these blasphemies, and I will promise you that many bamboo splinters shall be driven up under your rebellious nails."

"Let our ears be no longer filled with these atrocious utterances!" cried Hang-pou. "O brave and splendid Mandarins, order your terrifying tigers to arrest this depraved rebel, in order that we may hasten with him to Pekin."

"Before you throw the chains of sorrow around my neck, O tailor of celestial inspirations," said

Piou-Lu, with calm mockery,—"before the terrible weight of your just hand falls upon me, I pray you, if you would oblige me, to look at that duck." So saying, Piou-Lu pointed to where the shadow of the duck was sitting on the body of the wolf.

"Oh, what a beautiful duck!" cried Hang-pou, with glistening eyes, and clapping his hands. "Let us try and catch him!"

"It is indeed a majestic duck," said Mandarin Lin, gravely stroking his mustache. "I am favorable to his capture."

"You will wait until we catch the duck, illustrious rebel!" said Hang-pou to Piou-Lu, very innocently, never turning his eyes from the duck, to which they seemed to be glued by some singular spell of attraction.

"I will talk with the Mandarin Wei-chang-tze while you put your noble manœuvres into motion," answered Piou-Lu.

"Now, let us steal upon the duck," said Hang-pou. "Handsomely-formed duck, we entreat of you to remain as quiet as possible, in order that we may grasp you in our hands."

Then, as if actuated by a single impulse, the entire crowd, with the exception of Wei-chang-tze and Piou-Lu, moved toward the duck. The Mandarins stepped on tiptoe, with bent bodies, and little black eyes glistening with eagerness; Hang-pou crawled on his belly like a serpent; and the soldiers, casting aside their bows and shields, crept, with their hands upon their sides, toward the beautiful bird. The duck

remained perfectly quiet, its variegated wings shining like painted talc, and its neck lustrous as the court robe of a first-class Mandarin. The crowd scarcely breathed, so intense was their eagerness to capture the duck; and they moved slowly forward, gradually surrounding it.

Hang-pou was the first to make a clutch at the bird, but he was very much astonished to find his hand closing on empty air, while the duck remained seated on the wolf, as still as a picture.

"Miserable tailor!" cried Mandarin Lin, "your hand is a sieve, with meshes wide enough to strain elephants. How can you catch the beautiful duck? Behold me!" and Mandarin Lin made a rapid and well-calculated dive at the duck. To the wonderment of every one except Piou-Lu and Wei-chang-tze, the duck seemed to ooze through his fingers, and, escaping, flew away to the other end of the room.

"If my hand is a sieve," said Hang-pou, "it is evident that the noble Mandarin's hand is not a wall of beaten copper, for it lets ducks fly through with wonderful ease."

"It is a depraved and abominable duck, of criminal parentage," said Mandarin Lin, in a terrible rage; "and I vow, by the whiskers of the Dragon, that I will catch it and burn it on a spit."

"O, yes!" cried the entire crowd,—Mandarins, soldiers, and the little tailor,—all now attracted to the chase of the duck by a power that they could no longer resist. "O, yes! we will most assuredly capture this little duck, and, depriving him of his

feathers, punish him on a spit that is exceedingly hot."

So the chase commenced. Here and there, from one corner to the other, up the walls, on the altar of the household gods,—in short, in every possible portion of the large room, did the Mandarins, the little tailor, and the soldiers pursue the shadow of the beautiful duck. Never was seen such a duck. It seemed to be in twenty places at a time. One moment Mandarin Lin would throw himself bodily on the bird, in hopes of crushing it, and would call out triumphantly that now indeed he had the duck; but the words would be hardly out of his mouth when a loud shout from the rest of the party would disabuse his mind, and, turning, he would behold the duck marching proudly down the centre of the floor. Another time a soldier would declare that he had the duck in his breeches pocket; but while his neighbors were carefully probing that recess the duck would be seen calmly emerging from his right-hand sleeve. One time Hang-Pou sat down suddenly on the mouth of a large china jar, and resolutely refused to stir, declaring that he had seen the duck enter the jar, and that he was determined to sit upon the mouth until the demon of a duck was starved to death. But even while uttering his heroic determination, his mouth was seen to open very wide, and, to the astonishment of all, the duck flew out. In an instant the whole crowd was after him again; Mandarin Hy-le tumbled over Mandarin Ching-tze, and Mandarin Lin nearly drove his head through Hang-

pou's stomach. The unhappy wretches began now to perspire and grow faint with fatigue, but the longer the chase went on the hotter it grew. There was no rest for any of them. From corner to corner, from side to side,—now in one direction, now in another,—no matter whither the duck flew, they were compelled to follow. Their faces streamed, and their legs seemed ready to sink under them. Their eyeballs were ready to start out of their heads, and they had the air of government couriers who had travelled five hundred *li* in eleven days. They were nearly dead.

"Those men will surely perish, illustrious claimant of the throne," said Wei-chang-tze, gazing with astonishment at this mad chase.

"Let them perish!" said the conjurer; "so will perish all the enemies of the Celestial sovereign, Tién-té. Wei-chang-tze, once more, do you accept my offer? If you remain here, you will be sent to Pekin in chains; if you come with me, I will gird your waist with the scarf of Perpetual Delight. We want wise men like you to guide our armies, and—"

"And the illustrious Tién-té loves the Mandarin's daughter," said Wei-chang-tze, roguishly finishing the sentence. "Light of the Universe and Son of Heaven, Wei-chang-tze is your slave!"

Piou-Lu—for I still call him by his conjurer's name—gave a low whistle, and, obedient to the summons, Wu's delicate shape came gliding from the corridor toward her lover, with the dainty step of a young fawn going to the fountain.

"Wu," said Piou-Lu, "the marble is carved, and the hour is come."

"My father, then, has consented?" said Wu, looking timidly at her father.

"When the Emperor of the Central Land condescends to woo, what father dare refuse?" said Wei-chang-tze.

"Emperor!" said Wu, opening her black eyes with wonder. "My Piou-Lu an Emperor!"

"I am indeed the son of the Dragon," said Piou-Lu, folding her to his breast, "and you shall sit upon a throne of ivory and gold."

"And I thought you were only a conjurer!" murmured Wu, hiding her head in his yellow gown.

"But how are we to leave this place?" asked Wei-chang-tze, looking alarmed. "The guard will seize us if they get knowledge of your presence."

"We shall be at my castle in the mountains of Tse-Hing, near the Kouéï-Lin, in less than a minute," answered Piou-Lu; "for to the possessor of the Dragon Fang all things are possible."

Even as he spoke the ground began to slide from under their feet with wonderful rapidity, leaving them motionless and upright. Houses, walls, gardens, fields, all passed by them with the swiftness of a dream, until, in a few seconds, they found themselves in the mountain castle of Tién-té, where they were welcomed with a splendid hospitality. Wu became the favorite wife of the adventurous Emperor, and Wei-chang-tze one of his most famous generals.

The day after these events some Tartar soldiers entered Wei-chang-tze's house to search for the Mandarin, when, in the reception-hall, they were confounded at finding a number of men lying dead upon the floor, while in the midst sat a beautiful duck, that immediately on their entrance flew out through a window, and was seen no more. The dead men were soon recognized, and it was the opinion of the people of Tching-tou that Wei-chang-tze had poisoned all the soldiers and Mandarins, and then fled. The tailor, Hang-pou, being among the corpses, was found to have given his creditors the slip forever.

Victory still sits on the banner of Tién-té, and he will, without doubt, by the time that the tea is again fit to gather, sit upon the ancient throne of his ancestors.

Everything is now gracefully concluded.

THE END

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